UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY

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UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY

NINE ESSAYS

Unitarian Christianity

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NOTE.

THE first four essays in this volume were written many years ago; and it is several years since the others were prepared. The discourse on 'The Future Life' has already appeared in *Unitarian Affirmations* by the Rev. R. T. Herford. As Unitarian Tracts they have had a world-wide circulation among religious inquirers. There are not a few people to whom they have brought a message of enlightenment and inspiration. In the hope that others may be similarly helped the essays are issued in this more permanent form.

W. C. B.

Kingussie, *August*, 1912.

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UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY[1]

THE UNITY OF GOD

We believe in the doctrine of God's unity, or that there is one God, and one only. The proposition that there is one God seems to us exceedingly plain. We understand by it that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong. We conceive that these words could have conveyed no other meaning to the simple and uncultivated people who were set apart to be the depositaries of this great truth, and who were utterly incapable of understanding those hairbreadth distinctions between being and person which the sagacity of later ages has discovered. We find no intimation that this language was

[1] Abridged from Dr. Channing's Discourse.

to be taken in an unusual sense, or that God's unity was quite a different thing from the oneness of other intelligent beings.

We object to the doctrine of the Trinity that, whilst acknowledging in words, it subverts in effect, the unity of God. According to this doctrine, there are three infinite and equal persons, possessing supreme divinity, called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these persons, as described by theologians, has his own particular consciousness, will, and perceptions. They love each other, converse with each other, and delight in each other's society. They perform different parts in man's redemption, each having his appropriate office, and neither doing the work of the other. The Son is mediator, and not the Father. The Father sends the Son, and is not himself sent; nor is he conscious, like the Son, of taking flesh. Here, then, we have three intelligent agents, possessed of different consciousnesses, different wills, and different perceptions, performing different acts, and sustaining different relations; and if these

things do not imply and constitute three minds or beings, we are utterly at a loss to know how three minds or beings are to be formed. It is difference of properties, and acts, and consciousness, which leads us to the belief of different intelligent beings, and if this mark fails us, our whole knowledge fails ; we have no proof that all the agents and persons in the universe are not one and the same mind. When we attempt to conceive of three Gods, we can do nothing more than represent to ourselves three agents, distinguished from each other by similar marks and peculiarities to those which separate the persons of the Trinity ; and when common Christians hear these persons spoken of as conversing with each other, loving each other, and performing different acts, how can they help regarding them as different beings, different minds ?

TRINITARIANISM IRRATIONAL AND UNSCRIPTURAL

We do, then, with all earnestness protest against the irrational and unscriptural

doctrine of the Trinity. 'To us,' as to the Apostle and the primitive Christians, 'there is one God, even the Father.' With Jesus we worship the Father as the only living and true God. We are astonished that any man can read the New Testament and avoid the conviction that the Father alone is God. We find the Father continually distinguished from Jesus by this title. 'God sent his Son.' 'God anointed Jesus.' Now, how singular and inexplicable is this phraseology, which fills the New Testament, if this title belong equally to Jesus, and if a principal object of this book is to reveal him as God, as partaking equally with the Father in supreme divinity! Can any person adduce one passage in the New Testament where the word God means three persons, where it is not limited to one person, and where, unless turned from its usual sense by the connexion, it does not mean the Father? Could stronger proof be given that the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead is not a fundamental doctrine of Christianity?

This doctrine, were it true, must, from

its difficulty, singularity, and importance, have been laid down with great clearness, guarded with great care, and stated with all possible precision. But where does such statement appear? From the many passages which treat of God, we ask for one, one only, in which we are told that he is a threefold being, or that he is three persons, or that he is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. On the contrary, in the New Testament, where, at least, we might expect many express assertions of this nature, God is declared to be one, without the least attempt to prevent the acceptation of the words in their common sense; and he is always spoken of and addressed in the singular number, that is, in language which was universally understood to intend a single person, and to which no other idea could have been attached without an express admonition. So entirely do the Scriptures abstain from stating the Trinity, that when ecclesiastics would insert it into their creeds and doxologies, they are compelled to leave the Bible, and to invent forms of words altogether unsanctioned

by Scriptural phraseology. That a doctrine so strange, so liable to misapprehension, so fundamental as this is said to be, and requiring such careful exposition, should be left so undefined and unprotected to be made out by inference, and to be hunted through distant and detached parts of Scripture—this is a difficulty which, we think, no ingenuity can explain.

TRINITARIANISM UNFAVOURABLE TO PIETY

We have further objections to this doctrine, drawn from its practical influence. We regard it as unfavourable to devotion, by dividing and distracting the mind in its communion with God. It is a great excellence of the doctrine of God's unity, that it offers to us one Object of supreme homage, adoration, and love, one Infinite Father, one Being of beings, one Original and Fountain, to whom we may refer all good, in whom all our powers and affections may be concentrated, and whose lovely and venerable nature may pervade all our thoughts. True piety, when

directed to an undivided Deity, has a chasteness, a singleness, most favourable to religious awe and love. Now the Trinity sets before us three distinct objects of supreme adoration; three infinite persons having equal claims on our hearts; three divine agents, performing different offices, and to be acknowledged and worshipped in different relations. And is it possible, we ask, that the weak and limited mind of man can attach itself to these with the same power and joy as to One Infinite Father, the only First Cause, in whom all the blessings of nature and redemption meet as their centre and source? Must not devotion be distracted by the equal and rival claims of three equal persons, and must not the worship of the conscientious consistent Christian be disturbed by an apprehension lest he withhold from one or another of these his due proportion of homage?

We also think that the doctrine of the Trinity injures devotion, not only by joining to the Father other objects of worship, but by taking from the Father

the supreme affection which is his due, and transferring it to the Son. This is a most important view. That Jesus Christ, if exalted into the infinite Divinity, should be more interesting than the Father, is precisely what might be expected from history, and from the principles of human nature. Men want an object of worship like themselves, and the great secret of idolatry lies in this propensity. A God, clothed in our form, and feeling our wants and sorrows, speaks to our weak nature more strongly than a Father in heaven, a pure spirit, invisible and unapproachable, save by the reflecting and purified mind. We think, too, that the peculiar offices ascribed to Jesus by the popular theology, make him the most attractive person in the Godhead. The Father is the depositary of the justice, the vindicator of the rights, the avenger of the laws of the Divinity. On the other hand, the Son, the brightness of the divine mercy, stands between the incensed Deity and guilty humanity, exposes his meek head to the storm, and his compassionate breast

to the sword of the divine justice, bears our whole load of punishment, and purchases with his blood every blessing which descends from heaven. Need we state the effect of these representations, especially on common minds, for whom Christianity was chiefly designed, and whom it seeks to bring to the Father as the loveliest Being? We do believe that the worship of a bleeding, suffering God tends strongly to absorb the mind, and to draw it from other objects, just as the human tenderness of the Virgin Mary has given her so conspicuous a place in the devotions of the Church of Rome. We believe, too, that this worship, though attractive, is not most fitted to spiritualize the mind, that it awakens human transport rather than that deep veneration of the moral perfections of God which is the essence of piety.

THE UNITY OF JESUS

In the second place, we believe in the unity of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus is one mind, one soul, one being, as truly one as we are, and equally distinct

from the one God. We complain of the doctrine of the Trinity, that, not satisfied with making God three beings, it makes Jesus Christ two beings, and thus introduces infinite confusion into our conceptions of his character. This corruption of Christianity, alike repugnant to common sense and to the general strain of Scripture, is a remarkable proof of the power of a false philosophy in disfiguring the simple truth of Jesus.

According to this doctrine, Jesus Christ, instead of being one mind, one conscious intelligent principle, whom we can understand, consists of two souls, two minds; the one divine, the other human; the one weak, the other almighty; the one ignorant, the other omniscient. Now we maintain that this is to make Christ two beings. To denominate him one person, one being, and yet to suppose him made up of two minds infinitely different from each other, is to abuse and confound language, and to throw darkness over all our conceptions of intelligent natures. According to the common doctrine, each of these two minds

in Christ has its own consciousness, its own will, its own perceptions. They have, in fact, no common properties. The divine mind feels none of the wants and sorrows of the human, and the human is infinitely removed from the perfection and happiness of the divine. Can you conceive of two beings in the universe more distinct? We have always thought that one person was constituted and distinguished by one consciousness. The doctrine that one and the same person should have two consciousnesses, two wills, two souls, infinitely different from each other, this we think an enormous tax on human credulity.

We say that if a doctrine so strange, so difficult, so remote from all the previous conceptions of men, be indeed a part, and an essential part, of revelation, it must have been taught with great distinctness; and we ask our brethren to point to some plain, direct passage where Christ is said to be composed of two minds infinitely different, yet constituting one person. We find none. Surely, if Jesus Christ felt that

he consisted of two minds, and that this was a leading feature of his religion, his phraseology respecting himself would have been coloured by this peculiarity. The universal language of men is framed upon the idea that one person is one person, is one mind, and one soul; and when the multitude heard this language from the lips of Jesus, they must have taken it in its usual sense, and must have referred to a single soul all which he spoke, unless expressly instructed to interpret it differently. But where do we find this instruction? Where do you meet, in the New Testament, with the phraseology which abounds in Trinitarian books, and which necessarily grows from the doctrine of two natures in Jesus? Where does this divine teacher say, 'This I speak as God, and this as man; this is true only of my human mind, this only of my divine'? Where do we find in the Epistles a trace of this strange phraseology? Nowhere. It was not needed in that day. It was demanded by the errors of a later age.

JESUS NEVER IDENTIFIES HIMSELF WITH GOD

We wish that those from whom we differ would weigh one striking fact. Jesus, in his preaching, continually spoke of God. The word was always in his mouth. We ask, does he by this word ever mean himself? We say, never. On the contrary, he most plainly distinguishes between God and himself, and so do his disciples. How this is to be reconciled with the idea that the manifestation of Christ as God was a primary object of Christianity, our adversaries must determine.

If we examine the passages in which Jesus is distinguished from God, we shall see that they not only speak of him as another being, but seem to labour to express his inferiority. He is continually spoken of as the Son of God, sent of God, receiving all his powers from God, working miracles because God was with him, judging justly because God taught him, having claims on our belief because he was anointed and sealed by God, and as able of himself to do nothing. The New

Testament is filled with this language. Now we ask what impression such language was fitted and intended to make? Could any who heard it have imagined that Jesus was the very God to whom he was so industriously declared to be inferior; the very Being by whom he was sent, and from whom he professed to have received his message and power? Let it here be remembered, that the human birth, and bodily form, and humble circumstances, and mortal sufferings of Jesus, must all have prepared men to interpret in the most unqualified manner the language in which his inferiority to God was declared. Why, then, was this language used so continually, and without limitation, if Jesus were the Supreme Deity, and if this truth were an essential part of his religion? I repeat it, the human condition and sufferings of Christ tended strongly to exclude from men's minds the idea of his proper Godhead; and, of course, we should expect to find in the New Testament perpetual care and effort to counteract this tendency, to hold him forth as the same being with

his Father, if this doctrine were, as is pretended, the soul and centre of his religion. We should expect to find the phraseology of Scripture cast into the mould of this doctrine, to hear familiarly of God the Son, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be told that to us there is one God, even Jesus. But, instead of this, the inferiority of Christ pervades the New Testament. It is not only implied in the general phraseology, but repeatedly and decidedly expressed, and unaccompanied with any admonition to prevent its application to his whole nature. Could it, then, have been the great design of the sacred writers to exhibit Jesus as the Supreme God?

THE DOCTRINE OF A SUFFERING GOD

Trinitarians profess to derive some important advantages from their mode of viewing Christ. It furnishes them, they tell us, with an infinite atonement, for it shows them an infinite being suffering for their sins. The confidence with which this fallacy is repeated astonishes us. When pressed with the question whether

they really believe that the infinite and unchangeable God suffered and died on the cross they acknowledge that this is not true, but that Christ's human mind alone sustained the pains of death. How have we, then, an infinite sufferer? This language seems to us an imposition on common minds, and very derogatory to God's justice, as if this attribute could be satisfied by a sophism and a fiction.

We are also told that Christ is a more interesting object, that his love and mercy are more felt, when he is viewed as the Supreme God, who left his glory to take humanity, and to suffer for men. That Trinitarians are strongly moved by this representation, we do not mean to deny; but we think their emotions altogether founded on a misapprehension of their own doctrines. They talk of the second person of the Trinity leaving his glory and his Father's bosom to visit and save the world. But this second person, being the unchangeable and infinite God, was evidently incapable of parting with the least degree of his perfection and felicity.

At the moment of his taking flesh, he was as intimately present with his Father as before, and equally with his Father filled heaven, and earth, and immensity. This Trinitarians acknowledge; and still they profess to be touched and overwhelmed by the amazing humiliation of this immutable being! But not only does their doctrine, when fully explained, reduce Christ's humiliation to a fiction, it almost wholly destroys the impressions with which his cross ought to be viewed. According to their doctrine, Christ was comparatively no sufferer at all. It is true, his human mind suffered; but this, they tell us, was an infinitely small part of Jesus, bearing no more proportion to his whole nature than a single hair of our heads to the whole body, or than a drop to the ocean. The divine mind of Christ, that which was most properly himself, was infinitely happy at the very moment of the suffering of his humanity. Whilst hanging on the cross, he was the happiest being in the universe, as happy as the infinite Father; so that his pains, compared with

his felicity, were nothing. This Trinitarians do, and must, acknowledge. It follows necessarily from the immutableness of the divine nature which they ascribe to Christ; so that their system, justly viewed, robs his death of interest, weakens our sympathy with his sufferings, and is, of all others, most unfavourable to a love of Christ founded on a sense of his sacrifices for mankind. We esteem our own views to be vastly more affecting. It is our belief that Christ's humiliation was real and entire, that the whole Saviour, and not a part of him, suffered, that his crucifixion was a scene of deep and unmixed agony. As we stand round his cross, our minds are not distracted, nor our sensibility weakened by contemplating him as composed of incongruous and infinitely differing minds, and as having a balance of infinite felicity. We recognize in the dying Jesus but one mind. This we think renders his sufferings, and his patience and love in bearing them, incomparably more impressive and affecting than the system we oppose.

THE MORAL PERFECTION OF GOD

I now proceed to another point, on which we lay still greater stress. We believe in the moral perfection of God. We consider no part of theology so important as that which treats of God's moral character; and we value our views of Christianity chiefly as they assert his amiable and venerable attributes.

It may be said that in regard to this subject all Christians agree, that all ascribe to the Supreme Being infinite justice, goodness, and holiness. We reply that it is very possible to speak of God magnificently, and to think of him meanly; to apply to his person high-sounding epithets, and to his government principles which make him odious. The heathens called Jupiter the greatest and the best; but his history was black with cruelty and lust. We cannot judge of men's real ideas of God by their general language, for in all ages they have hoped to soothe the Deity by adulation. We must inquire into their particular views of his purposes,

of the principles of his administration, and of his disposition towards his creatures.

We conceive that Christians have generally leaned towards a very injurious view of the Supreme Being. They have too often felt as if he was raised, by his greatness and sovereignty, above the principles of morality, above those eternal laws of equity and rectitude to which all other beings are subjected. We believe that in no being is the sense of right so strong, so omnipotent, as in God. We believe that his almighty power is entirely submitted to his perceptions of rectitude; and this is the ground of our piety. It is not because he is our Creator merely, but because he created us for good and holy purposes; it is not because his will is irresistible, but because his will is the perfection of virtue, that we pay him allegiance. We cannot bow before a being, however great and powerful, who governs tyrannically. We respect nothing but excellence, whether on earth or in heaven. We venerate not the loftiness of God's

throne, but the equity and goodness in which it is established.

We believe that God is infinitely good, kind, benevolent, in the proper sense of these words; good in disposition as well as in act; good not to a few, but to all; good to every individual, as well as to the general system.

We believe, too, that God is just; but we never forget that his justice is the justice of a good being, dwelling in the same mind, and acting in harmony with perfect benevolence. By this attribute we understand God's infinite regard to virtue or moral worth expressed in a moral government; that is, in giving excellent and equitable laws, and in conferring such rewards, and inflicting such punishments, as are best fitted to secure their observance. God's justice has for its end the highest virtue of the creation, and it punishes for this end alone; and thus it coincides with benevolence; for virtue and happiness, though not the same, are inseparably conjoined.

To give our views of God in one word, we believe in his Parental character. We ascribe to him not only the name, but the dispositions and principles, of a father. We believe that he has a father's concern for his creatures, a father's desire for their improvement, a father's equity in proportioning his commands to their powers, a father's joy in their progress, a father's readiness to receive the penitent, and a father's justice for the incorrigible. We look upon this world as a place of education in which he is training men by prosperity and adversity, by aids and obstructions, by conflicts of reason and passion, by motives to duty and temptations to sin, by a various discipline suited to free and moral beings, for union with himself, and for a sublime and ever-growing virtue in heaven.

Now we object to the systems of religion which prevail among us, that they are adverse, in a greater or less degree, to these purifying, comforting, and honourable views of God; that they take from us our Father in heaven, and substitute for him

a being whom we cannot love if we would, and whom we ought not to love if we could. We object, particularly on this ground, to that system which arrogates to itself the name of Orthodoxy, and which is industriously propagated through the country. This system, indeed, takes various shapes, but in all it casts dishonour on the Creator. According to its old and genuine form, it teaches that God brings us into life wholly depraved, so that under the innocent features of our childhood is hidden a nature adverse to all good and propense to all evil, a nature which exposes us to God's displeasure and wrath, even before we have acquired power to understand our duties or to reflect upon our actions. According to a more modern exposition, it teaches that we came from the hands of our Maker with such a constitution, and are placed under such influences and circumstances, as to render certain and infallible the total depravity of every human being from the first moment of his moral agency; and it also teaches that the offence of the child, who

brings into life this ceaseless tendency to unmingled crime, exposes him to the sentence of everlasting damnation. Now, according to the plainest principles of morality, we maintain that a natural constitution of the mind, unfailingly disposing it to evil, and to evil alone, would absolve it from guilt; that to give existence under this condition would argue unspeakable cruelty; and that to punish the sin of this unhappily constituted child with endless ruin, would be a wrong unparalleled by the most merciless despotism.

THE EVILS OF CALVINISM

This system also teaches that God selects from this corrupt mass a number to be saved, and plucks them, by a special influence, from the common ruin; that the rest of mankind, though left without that special grace which their conversion requires, are commanded to repent, under penalty of aggravated woe; and that forgiveness is promised them on terms which their very constitution infallibly

disposes them to reject, and in rejecting which they awfully enhance the punishments of hell. These proffers of forgiveness and exhortations to amendment, to beings born under a blighting curse, fill our minds with a horror which we want words to express.

That this religious system does not produce all the effects on character which might be anticipated, we most joyfully admit. It is often, very often, counteracted by nature, conscience, common sense, by the general strain of Scripture, by the mild example and precepts of Christ, and by the many positive declarations of God's universal kindness and perfect equity. But still we think that we see its unhappy influence. It tends to discourage the timid, to give excuses to the bad, to feed the vanity of the fanatical, and to offer shelter to the bad feelings of the malignant. By shocking as it does the fundamental principles of morality, and by exhibiting a severe and partial Deity, it tends strongly to pervert the moral faculty, to form a gloomy, forbidding, and servile religion,

and to lead men to substitute censoriousness, bitterness, and persecution, for a tender and impartial charity. We think, too, that this system, which begins with degrading human nature, may be expected to end in pride; for pride grows out of a consciousness of high distinctions, however obtained, and no distinction is so great as that which is made between the elected and abandoned of God.

The false and dishonourable views of God which have now been stated, we feel ourselves bound to resist unceasingly. Other errors we can pass over with comparative indifference. But we ask not to be deprived of a God worthy of our love and trust, in whom our moral sentiments may delight, in whom our weaknesses and sorrows may find refuge. We cling to the divine perfections. We meet them everywhere in creation, we read them in the Scriptures, we see a lovely image of them in Jesus Christ; and gratitude, love, and veneration, call on us to assert them. Reproached, as we often are, by men, it is our consolation and happiness that one

of our chief offences is the zeal with which we vindicate the dishonoured goodness and rectitude of God.

CHRISTIAN VIRTUE OR TRUE HOLINESS

We believe that all virtue has its foundation in the moral nature of man, that is, in conscience, or his sense of duty, and in the power of forming his temper and life according to conscience. We believe that these moral faculties are the grounds of responsibility, and the highest distinctions of human nature, and that no act is praiseworthy any further than as it springs from their exertion. We believe that no dispositions infused into us without our own moral activity are of the nature of virtue, and therefore we resist the doctrine of irresistible divine influence on the human mind, moulding it into goodness as marble is hewn into a statue. Such goodness, if this word may be used, would not be the object of moral approbation any more than the instinctive affections of inferior animals, or the constitutional amiableness of human beings.

By these remarks we do not mean to deny the importance of God's aid or Spirit; but by his Spirit we mean a moral, illuminating, and persuasive influence, not physical, not compulsory, not involving a necessity of virtue. We object, strongly, to the idea of many Christians respecting man's impotence and God's irresistible agency on the heart, believing that they subvert our responsibility and the laws of our moral nature, that they make men machines, that they cast on God the blame of all evil deeds, that they discourage good minds, and inflate the fanatical with wild conceits of immediate and sensible inspiration.

THE LOVE OF GOD

Among the virtues, we give the first place to the love of God. We believe that this principle is the true end and happiness of our being, that we were made for union with our Creator, that his infinite perfection is the only sufficient object and true resting-place for the insatiable desires and unlimited capacities of the human mind,

and that without him our noblest sentiments, admiration, veneration, hope, and love, would wither and decay. We believe, too, that the love of God is not only essential to happiness, but to the strength and perfection of all the virtues; that conscience, without the sanction of God's authority and retributive justice, would be a weak director: that benevolence, unless nourished by communion with his goodness, and encouraged by his smile, could not thrive amidst the selfishness and thanklessness of the world; and that self-government, without a sense of the divine inspection, would hardly extend beyond an outward and partial purity. God, as he is essentially goodness, holiness, justice, and virtue, so he is the life, motive, and sustainer of virtue in the human soul.

But whilst we earnestly inculcate the love of God, we believe that great care is necessary to distinguish it from counterfeits. We think that much which is called piety is worthless. Many have fallen into the error that there can be no excess in feelings which have God for their object; and,

distrusting as coldness that self-possession without which virtue and devotion lose all their dignity, they have abandoned themselves to extravagances which have brought contempt on piety. Most certainly, if the love of God be that which often bears its name, the less we have of it the better. If religion be the shipwreck of understanding, we cannot keep too far from it. On this subject we always speak plainly. We cannot sacrifice our reason to the reputation of zeal. We owe it to truth and religion to maintain that fanaticism, partial insanity, sudden impressions, and ungovernable transports, are anything rather than piety.

I need not express to you our views on the subject of the benevolent virtues. We attach such importance to these, that we are sometimes reproached with exalting them above piety. We regard the spirit of love, charity, meekness, forgiveness, liberality, and beneficence, as the badge and distinction of Christians, as the brightest image we can bear of God, as the best proof of piety. On this subject

I need not and cannot enlarge; but there is one branch of benevolence which I ought not to pass over in silence, because we think that we conceive of it more highly and justly than many of our brethren. I refer to the duty of candour, charitable judgment, especially towards those who differ in religious opinion. We think that in nothing have Christians so widely departed from their religion as in this particular. We are astonished at the hardihood of those who, with Christ's warnings sounding in their ears, take on them the responsibility of making creeds for his Church, and cast out professors of virtuous lives for imagined errors, for the guilt of thinking for themselves. We know that zeal for truth is the cover for this usurpation of Christ's prerogative; but we think that zeal for truth, as it is called, is very suspicious, except in men whose capacities and advantages, whose patient deliberation, and whose improvements in humility, mildness, and candour, give them a right to hope that their views are more just than those of their neighbours.

I have thus given the distinguishing views of those Christians in whose name I have spoken. We have embraced this system not hastily or lightly, but after much deliberation; and we hold it fast, not merely because we believe it to be true, but because we regard it as purifying truth, as a doctrine according to godliness, as able to 'work mightily,' and to 'bring forth fruit in them who believe.' That we wish to spread it, we have no desire to conceal; but we think that we wish its diffusion because we regard it as more friendly to practical piety and pure morals than the opposite doctrines, because it gives clearer and nobler views of duty and stronger motives to its performance, because it recommends religion at once to the understanding and the heart, because it asserts the lovely and venerable attributes of God, because it tends to restore the benevolent spirit of Jesus to his divided and afflicted Church. We see nothing in our views to give offence save their purity, and it is their purity which makes us seek their extension through the world.

THE IMITABLENESS OF CHRIST'S CHARACTER[1]

THE example of Jesus is our topic. To incite you to follow it is the aim of this discourse. Christ came to give us a religion—but this is not all. By a wise and beautiful ordination of Providence he was sent to show forth his religion in himself. He did not come to sit in a hall of legislation, and from some commanding eminence to pronounce laws and promises. He is not a mere channel through which certain communications are made from God; not a mere messenger appointed to utter the words which he had heard and then to disappear, and to sustain no further connexion with his message. He came not only to teach with his lips but to be a living manifestation of his religion—to be, in an important sense, the religion itself.

[1] From a Discourse by Dr. W. E. Channing.

This is a peculiarity worthy of attention. Christianity is not a mere code of laws, not an abstract system such as theologians frame. It is a living, embodied religion. It comes to us in a human form; it offers itself to our eyes as well as ears; it breathes, it moves in our sight. It is more than precept; it is example and action.

The importance of example, who does not understand? How much do most of us suffer from the presence, conversation, spirit of men of low minds by whom we are surrounded! The temptation is strong to take as our standard the average character of the society in which we live, and to satisfy ourselves with decencies and attainments which secure to us among the multitude the name of respectable men. On the other hand, there is a power (have you not felt it?) in the presence, conversation and example of a man of strong principle and magnanimity, to lift us, at least for the moment, from our vulgar and tame habits of thought, and to kindle some generous aspirations after the excellence

which we were made to attain. I hardly need say to you that it is impossible to place ourselves under any influence of this nature so quickening as the example of Jesus. This introduces us to the highest order of virtues. This is fitted to awaken the whole mind. Nothing has equal power to neutralize the coarse, selfish, and sensual influences amidst which we are plunged, to refine our conception of duty, and to reveal to us the perfection on which our hopes and most strenuous desires should habitually fasten.

There is one cause which has done much to defeat this good influence of Christ's character and example, and which ought to be exposed. It is this. Multitudes, I am afraid great multitudes, think of Jesus as a being to be admired rather than approached. They have some vague conceptions of a glory in his nature and character which makes it presumption to think of proposing him as their standard. He is thrown so far from them that he does them little good. Many feel that a close resemblance of Jesus Christ is not to be

expected; that this, like many other topics, may serve for declamation in the pulpit, but is utterly incapable of being reduced to practice. I think I am touching here an error which exerts a blighting influence on not a few minds. Until men think of the religion and character of Christ as truly applicable to them, as intended to be brought into continual operation, as what they must incorporate with their whole spiritual nature, they will derive little good from Christ. Men think indeed to honour Jesus when they place him so high as to discourage all effort to approach him. They really degrade him. They do not understand his character; they throw a glare over it which hides its true features. This vague admiration is the poorest tribute which they can pay him.

I wish, in this discourse, to prevent the discouraging influence of the greatness of Jesus Christ; to show that, however exalted, he is not placed beyond the reach of our sympathy and imitation.

I begin with the general observation that real greatness of character, greatness of

the highest order, far from being repulsive and discouraging, is singularly accessible and imitable, and, instead of severing a being from others, fits him to be their friend and model. A man who stands apart from his race, who has few points of contact with other men, who has a style and manner which strike awe and keep others far from him, whatever rank he may hold in his own and others' eyes, wants, after all, true grandeur of mind; and the spirit of this remark I think may be extended beyond men to higher orders of beings, to angels, and to Jesus Christ. A great soul is known by its enlarged, strong, and tender sympathies. True elevation of mind does not take a being out of the circle of those who are below him, but binds him faster to them and gives them advantages for a closer attachment and conformity to him.

Greatness of character is a communicable attribute; I should say singularly communicable. It has nothing exclusive in its nature. It cannot be the monopoly of an individual, for it is the enlarged and

generous action of faculties and affections which enter into and constitute all minds—I mean reason, conscience, and love—so that its elements exist in all. It is not a peculiar or exclusive knowledge which can be shut up in one or a few understandings; but the comprehension of great and universal truths, which are the proper objects of every rational being. It is not a devotion to peculiar, exclusive objects, but the adoption of public interests, the consecration of the mind to the cause of virtue and happiness in the Creation, that is, to the very cause which all intelligent beings are bound to espouse. Greatness is not a secret, solitary principle, working by itself and refusing participation, but frank and open-hearted—so large in its views, so liberal in its feelings, so expansive in its purposes, so beneficent in its labours, as naturally and necessarily to attract sympathy and co-operation. It is selfishness that repels men; and true greatness has not a stronger characteristic than its freedom from every selfish taint. So far from being imprisoned in private interests,

it covets nothing which it may not impart. So far from being absorbed in its own distinctions, it discerns nothing so quickly and joyfully as the capacities and pledges of greatness in others, and counts no labour so noble as to call forth noble sentiments, and the consciousness of a divine power, in less improved minds.

I know that those who call themselves great on earth are apt to estrange themselves from their inferiors; and the multitude, cast down by their high bearing, never think of proposing them as examples. But this springs wholly from the low conceptions of those whom we call the great, and shows a mixture of vulgarity of mind with their superior endowments. Genuine greatness is marked by simplicity, unostentatiousness, self-forgetfulness, a hearty interest in others, a feeling of brotherhood with the human family, and a respect for every intellectual and immortal being as capable of progress towards its own elevation. A superior mind, enlightened and kindled by just views of God and of the Creation, regards its gifts and powers

as so many bonds of union with other beings, as given it not to nourish self-elation, but to be employed for others, and still more to be communicated to others. Such greatness has no reserve, and especially no affected dignity of deportment. It is too conscious of its own power to need, and too benevolent to desire, to entrench itself behind forms and ceremonies; and when circumstances permit such a character to manifest itself to inferior beings, it is beyond all others the most winning, and most fitted to impart itself, or to call forth a kindred elevation of feeling. I know not in history an individual so easily comprehended as Jesus Christ, for nothing is so intelligible as sincere, disinterested love. I know not any being who is so fitted to take hold on all orders of minds; and accordingly he drew after him the unenlightened, the publican, and the sinner. It is a sad mistake, then, that Jesus Christ is too great to allow us to think of intimacy with him, and to think of making him our standard.

Let me confirm this truth by another

order of reflections. You tell me that Jesus Christ is so high that he cannot be your model; I grant the exaltation of his character. I believe him to be a more than human being. In truth all Christians so believe him. Those who suppose him not to have existed before his birth do not regard him as a mere man, though so reproached. They always separate him by broad distinctions from other men. They consider him as enjoying a communion with God, and as having received gifts, endowments, aid, lights from him, granted to no other, and as having exhibited a spotless purity, which is the highest distinction of heaven. All admit, and joyfully admit, that Jesus Christ by his greatness and goodness throws all other human attainments into obscurity. But on this account he is not less a standard, nor is he to discourage us, but, on the contrary, to breathe into us a more exhilarating hope; for though so far above us he is still one of us, and is only an illustration of the capacities which we all possess. This is a great truth.

Let me strive to unfold it. Perhaps I cannot better express my views than by saying that I regard all minds as of one family. When we speak of higher orders of beings, of angels and archangels, we are apt to conceive of distinct kinds or races of beings, separated from us and from each other by impassable barriers. But it is not so. All minds are of one family. There is no such partition in the spiritual world as you see in the material. In material nature you see wholly distinct classes of beings. A mineral is not a vegetable, and makes no approach to it; these two great kingdoms of nature are divided by immeasurable spaces. So, when we look at different races of animals, though all partake of that mysterious property, life, yet what an immense and impassable distance is there between the insect and the lion. They have no bond of union, no possibility of communication. During the lapse of ages, the animalcules which sport in the sunbeams a summer's day and then perish, have made no approximation to the king of the forests.

But in the intellectual world there are no such barriers. All minds are essentially of one origin, one nature, kindled from one divine flame, and are all tending to one centre, one happiness. This great truth, to us the greatest of truths, which lies at the foundation of all religion and of all hope, seems to me not only sustained by proofs which satisfy the reason, but to be one of the deep instincts of our nature. It mingles unperceived with all our worship of God, which uniformly takes for granted that he is a Mind having thought, affection, and volition like ourselves. It runs through false religions; and whilst, by its perversion, it has made them false, it has also given to them whatever purifying power they possess. But passing over this instinct, which is felt more and more to be unerring as the intellect is improved, this great truth of the unity or likeness of all minds seems to me demonstrable from this consideration, that Truth, the object and nutriment of mind, is one and immutable, so that the whole family of intelligent beings must have the same views, the

same motives, and the same general ends. For example, a truth of mathematics is not a truth only in this world, a truth to our minds, but a truth everywhere, a truth in heaven, a truth to God, who has indeed framed his Creation according to the laws of this universal science. So, happiness and misery, which lie at the foundation of morals, must be to all intelligent beings what they are to us, the objects, one of desire and hope and the other of aversion; and who can doubt that virtue and vice are the same everywhere as on earth, that in every community of beings the mind which devotes itself to the general weal must be more reverenced than a mind which would subordinate the general interest to its own? Thus all souls are one in nature, approach one another, and have grounds and bonds of communion with one another. I am not only one of the human race; I am one of the great intellectual family of God. There is no spirit so exalted with which I have not common thoughts and feelings. That conception which I have gained of One Uni-

versal Father, whose love is the fountain and centre of all things, is the dawn of the highest and most magnificent views in the universe, and if I look up to this being with filial love, I have the spring and beginning of the noblest sentiments and joys which are known in the universe. No greatness, therefore, of a being separates me from him, or makes him unapproachable by me. The mind of Jesus Christ and your mind are of one family; nor was there anything in his of which you have not the principle, the capacity, the promise in yourself. This is the very impression which he intends to give. He never held himself up as an inimitable and unapproachable being; but directly the reverse. He always spoke of himself as having come to communicate himself to others. He always invited men to believe on and adhere to him, that they might receive that very spirit, that pure, celestial spirit, by which he was himself actuated. 'Follow me,' is his lesson. The relation which he came to establish between himself and mankind was not that of master

and slave, but that of friends. He compares himself, in a spirit of divine benevolence, to a vine, which, you know, sends its own sap, that by which it is itself nourished, into all its branches. We read, too, these remarkable words in his prayer for his disciples, 'I have given to them the glory thou gavest me'; and I am persuaded that there is not a glory, a virtue, a power, a joy possessed by Jesus Christ, to which his disciples will not successively rise. In the spirit of these remarks the apostles say, 'Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ.'

I have said that all minds being of one family, the greatness of the mind of Christ is no discouragement to our adoption of him as our model. I now observe that there is one attribute of mind to which I have alluded, that should particularly animate us to propose to ourselves a sublime standard, as sublime as Jesus Christ. I refer to the principle of growth in human nature. We were made to grow. Our faculties are germs, and given for an expansion to which nothing authorizes us

to set bounds. The soul bears the impress of illimitableness in the thirst, the unquenchable thirst, which it brings with it into being, for a power, knowledge, happiness which it never gains, and which always carry it forward into futurity. The body soon reaches its limit. But intellect, affection, moral energy, in proportion to their growth, tend to further enlargement, and every acquisition is an impulse to something higher. When I consider this principle or capacity of the human soul, I cannot restrain the hope which it awakens. The partition-walls which imagination has reared between men and higher orders of beings vanish. I no longer see aught to prevent our becoming whatever was good and great in Jesus on earth. In truth, I feel my utter inability to conceive what a mind is to attain which is to advance for ever. Add but that element, eternity, to man's progress, and the results of his existence surpass not only human but angelic thought. Give me this, and the future glory of the human mind becomes to me as incomprehensible as God himself.

To encourage these thoughts and hopes, our Creator has set before us delightful exemplifications, even now, of this principle of growth both in outward nature and in the human mind. We meet them in nature. Suppose you were to carry a man wholly unacquainted with vegetation to the most majestic tree in our forests, and, whilst he was admiring its extent and proportions, suppose you should take from the earth at its root a little downy substance, which a breath might blow away, and say to him, That tree was once such a seed as this; it was wrapped up here; it once lived only within these delicate fibres, this narrow compass. With what incredulous wonder would he regard you! And if by an effort of imagination somewhat Oriental, we should suppose this little seed to be suddenly endued with thought, and to be told that it was one day to become this mighty tree, and to cast out branches which would spread an equal shade, and wave with equal grace, and withstand the winter winds; with what amazement may we suppose it to anticipate

its future lot! Such growth we witness in nature. A nobler hope we Christians are to cherish; and still more striking examples of the growth of mind are set before us in human history. We wonder, indeed, when we are told that one day we shall be as the angels of God. I apprehend that as great a wonder has been realized already on the earth. I apprehend that the distance between the mind of Newton and of a Hottentot may have been as great as between Newton and an angel. There is another view still more striking. This Newton, who lifted his calm, sublime eye to the heavens, and read among the planets and the stars the great law of the material universe, was, forty or fifty years before, an infant, without one clear perception, and unable to distinguish his nurse's arm from the pillow on which he slept. Howard, too, who under the strength of an all-sacrificing benevolence, explored the depths of human suffering, was, forty or fifty years before, an infant wholly absorbed in himself, grasping at all he saw, and almost breaking

his little heart with fits of passion when the idlest toy was withheld. Has not man already traversed as wide a space as separates him from angels? And why must he stop? There is no extravagance in the boldest anticipation. We may truly become one with Christ, a partaker of that celestial mind. He is truly our brother, one of our family. Let us make him our constant model.

I know not that the doctrine now laid down is liable but to one abuse. It may unduly excite susceptible minds, and impel to a vehemence of hope and exertion unfavourable in the end to the very progress which is proposed. To such I would say, Hasten to conform yourselves to Christ, but hasten according to the laws of your nature. As the body cannot, by the concentration of its whole strength into one bound, scale the height of a mountain, neither can the mind free every obstacle and achieve perfection by an agony of the will. Great effort is indeed necessary; but such as can be sustained, such as fits us for greater, such as will

accumulate, not exhaust, our spiritual force. The soul may be overstrained as truly as the body, and it often is so in seasons of extraordinary religious excitement; and the consequence is an injury to the constitution of the intellect and the heart which a life may not be able to repair. I rest the hopes for human nature which I have now expressed on its principle of growth; and growth, as you well know, is a gradual process, not a convulsive start accomplishing the work of years in a moment. All great attainments are gradual. As easily might a science be mastered by one struggle of thought, as sin be conquered by a spasm of remorse. Continuous patient effort, guided by wise deliberation, is the true means of spiritual progress. In religion, as in common life, mere force of vehemence will prove a fallacious substitute for the sobriety of wisdom.

The doctrine which I have chiefly laboured to maintain in this discourse, that minds are all of one family, are all brethren, and may be more and more

nearly united to God, seems to me to have been felt peculiarly by Jesus Christ; and if I were to point out the distinction of his greatness I should say it lay in this. He felt his superiority, but he never felt as if it separated him from mankind. He did not come among us as some great men would visit a colliery, or any other resort of the ignorant and corrupt, with an air of greatness, feeling himself above us, and giving benefits as if it were an infinite condescension. He came and mingled with us as a friend and a brother. He saw in every human being a mind which might wear his own brightest glory. He was severe only towards one class of men, and they were those who looked down on the multitude with contempt. Jesus respected human nature: he felt it to be his own. This was the greatness of Jesus Christ. He felt, as no other felt, a union of mind with the human race, felt that all had a spark of that same intellectual and immortal flame which dwelt in himself.

I insist on this view of his character, not only to encourage us to aspire after a like-

ness to Jesus; I consider it as peculiarly fitted to call forth love towards him. If I regard Jesus as an august stranger belonging to an entirely different class of existence from myself, having no common thoughts or feelings with me, and looking down upon me with only such a sympathy as I have with an inferior animal, I should regard him with a vague awe; but the immeasurable space between us would place him beyond friendship and affection. But when I feel that all minds form one family, that I have the same nature with Jesus, and that he came to communicate to me, by his teaching, example, and intercession, his own mind, to bring me into communion with what was sublimest, purest, happiest in himself, then I can love him as I love no other being, excepting only him who is the Father alike of Christ and of the Christian.

Believing, as I do, that I have now used no inflated language, but have spoken the words of truth and soberness, I exhort you with calmness, but earnestness, to choose and adopt Jesus Christ as your

example with the whole energy of your wills. I exhort you to resolve on following him, not, as perhaps you have done, with a faint and yielding purpose, but with the full conviction that your whole happiness is concentrated in the force and constancy of your adherence to this celestial guide. My friends, there is no other happiness. Let not the false views of Christianity which prevail in the world seduce you into the belief that Christ can bless you in any other way than by assimilating you to his own virtue, than by breathing into you his own mind. Do not imagine that any faith or love towards Jesus can avail you but that which quickens you to conform yourselves to his spotless purity and unconquerable rectitude. Settle it as an immovable truth, that neither in this world nor in the next can you be happy but in proportion to the sanctity and elevation of your characters. Let no man imagine that through the patronage or protection of Jesus Christ, or any other being, he can find peace or any sincere good but in the growth of an enlightened, firm,

disinterested, holy mind. Expect no good from Jesus any further than you clothe yourselves with excellence. He can impart to you nothing so precious as himself, as his own mind; and believe me, this mind may dwell in you. His sublimest virtues may be yours. Admit, welcome this great truth. Look up to the illustrious Son of God with the conviction that you may become one with him in thought, in feeling, in power, in holiness. His character will become a blessing just as far as it shall awaken in you this consciousness, this hope. The most lamentable scepticism on earth, and incomparably the most common, is a scepticism as to the greatness, powers, and high destinies of human nature. In this greatness I desire to cherish an unwavering faith. Tell me not of the universal corruption of the race. Humanity has already, in not a few instances, borne conspicuously the likeness of Christ and God. The sun grows dim, the grandeur of outward nature shrinks, when compared with the spiritual energy of men who, in the cause of truth, of God,

of charity, have spurned all bribes of ease, pleasure, renown, and have withstood shame, want, persecution, torture, and the most dreaded forms of death. In such men I learn that the soul was made in God's image, and made to conform itself to the loveliness and greatness of his Son.

My friends, we may all approach Jesus Christ. For all of us he died, to leave us an example that we should follow his steps. By earnest purpose, by self-conflict, by watching and prayer, by faith in the Christian promises, by those heavenly aids and illuminations which he that seeketh shall find, we may all unite ourselves in living bonds to Christ, may love as he loved, may act from his principles, may suffer with his constancy, may enter into his purposes, may sympathize with his self-devotion to the cause of God and mankind.

WHY AM I A UNITARIAN? [1]

WHY am I a Unitarian? Why are we Unitarians? Is it because we like to stand apart from the rest of the Christian Church? Is it because there is any special pleasure or satisfaction in being known as heretics? Is it because we would not enjoy as others enjoy being in the sympathy and in the brotherhood of the whole Christian Church? By no means. We should all like that. We are not Unitarians, and do not call ourselves Unitarians, because there is any special pleasure in standing thus alone and apart from our brethren whom we respect and honour, though they differ from us. Why, then, did Unitarians come out from the rest of the Christian Church and stand apart? It was because they thought that it was necessary to bear witness to some truths which they believed

[1] By Dr. James Freeman Clarke.

had been neglected or forgotten, and they were willing to encounter any possible obloquy or opposition in the defence of what seemed to them to be important truth.

And now I propose to show you why some of us still believe the same, and think that the time for this protest against many of the popular doctrines of the Christian Church is not over.

Perhaps some persons may say, 'What do you mean when you speak of a Unitarian? Unitarians have no creed, and, therefore, they have no common belief at all. There is nothing which can be represented as Unitarian belief, since there is among them no fixed or avowed creed.' It is very true that, for reasons which I shall presently state, we have not any formal creed or confession of faith; but it does not by any means follow from this that we have no common belief. There may be a common belief when there is no definite, precise, or formal statement of it. Suppose that you should go into one of our Universities, and should find there certain

professors calling themselves teachers of geology; or of chemistry; or of astronomy; and you should say to them, 'Where are your Thirty-nine Articles of astronomy? Where is your Confession of Faith of chemistry?' and they should reply, 'We have nothing of the sort.' 'Why, then, you cannot have any common belief; the astronomers in one university probably teach an entirely different doctrine from the astronomers in another; and so do the chemists and geologists.' 'No,' they would answer, 'we have a common belief, which is determined by certain convictions which we all share, certain knowledge which we all possess; and, though we may differ in details from each other, you will find that the professors of astronomy in Oxford in England, and Cambridge in the United States, and in the University of Paris, teach essentially the same thing, though they have not formulated their doctrines into any creed.'

We believe that there is a mischief in these fences which men set up and call creeds or articles, and therefore we refuse

to submit to them or to accept them. The tendency of the creed, we think, is to obstruct progress, because it defines beforehand the limits of opinion, and tells men before they begin to inquire what results they are to arrive at. And another difficulty about the creed is that it tends to hypocrisy. Far be it from me to say that those great denominations which have creeds are hypocrites. They are as honest, no doubt, as we are. Nevertheless, the tendency of the creed is that way. It is a remark which I have found in one of those charming volumes of Mrs. Stowe's, that 'it is a custom of theologians to assume that theology is a progressive science, and at the same time to maintain that we must hold exactly the same things which were held a hundred years ago.' Now, it is very true that you will find creeds which do not represent the present opinions of those who profess to hold the creeds. It would be very hard, I think, to-day, to find in the Presbyterian Church many clergymen who would teach the doctrine that infants dying in infancy were lost;

and yet what does the creed say in respect to that? It says, 'Elect infants shall be saved'; and it does not give us the least hope or promise that all children dying in infancy are elect, any more than they would all be elect were they to grow up and die then. And yet, though the creed certainly shows, so far as it shows anything, that the Presbyterian Church believes in the damnation of a large proportion of infants, its members would be shocked and horrified if we were to accuse them of that. And it was not a great while ago, in a Convocation of the Church of England—which Church ordains and commands that every one of its thirty thousand ministers shall, four times a year, read in the open church the Creed of St. Athanasius, which ends by stating that all who do not believe its metaphysical distinctions shall without doubt perish everlastingly—that, in that Convocation of the Church of England, a bishop arose and declared, without a single voice dissenting, that there was not a man in the whole body who believed that affirmation in the Creed. Well, the tend-

ency of all this is certainly towards hypocrisy; towards professing to believe what we do not believe. And for these two reasons, because creeds tend to prevent progress of thought, and because they tend towards making men profess what they have ceased to believe, we reject them.

I am speaking now for myself; and yet I believe, in speaking for myself, I am speaking for many more. In saying why I am a Unitarian, I do not profess to say that others who are not Unitarians may not believe a great many things that I do, and believe them more fully than I do.

(1) I give this as one reason for my belief: that the views commonly held by Unitarians can all be stated in the simple, distinct language of the New Testament, while few of the opinions which we reject can be so stated. If we are asked to give our views concerning God, for instance, we can say, in the words of Scripture, 'that though there may be many that are called gods, yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him,'[1]

[1] I Cor. viii. 5, 6.

and that 'in him we live, and move, and have our being'[1]; that 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all'[2]; that 'God is love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him.'[3] And if we are asked to give our belief concerning Christ, we can also express that belief in the simple words of Scripture: 'There is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus'[4]; 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know.'[5] These are the expressions which define precisely our views concerning God and Christ; but while the New Testament teaches so plainly that the Father is the only true God, it nowhere teaches that there are three subsistences or three persons in God. It nowhere uses the word Trinity at all, or Triad, or Triune, in

[1] Acts xvii. 28. [2] I John i. 5.
[3] I John iv. 16. [4] I Tim. ii. 5. [5] Acts ii. 22.
The citations above are here given from the Revised Version.

relation to God, these having all been subsequently invented for that purpose; but, moreover, it does not say anywhere that 'the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God.' It does not anywhere say that Christ is God the Son, the second person in the Trinity. It nowhere teaches that when Christ prayed to God he was praying to himself; that when he was tempted, he was the being whom the Scriptures say cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts any man; that when he said, 'I can do nothing of myself,' what he meant was that he could do everything of himself; that when he said, 'My Father is greater than I,' he meant by that to state that he was equal with God; and that when he says, 'No man hath seen God at any time,' the meaning of that is that Christ, whom so many had seen, was the unseen God. I am a Unitarian for this reason, to begin with: that we can state every one of our opinions in the plain, simple language of Scripture, while it is impossible to state the old

doctrines in such language. You cannot state the doctrine of the Trinity in the language of the New Testament. You cannot state the Deity of Christ in relation to the Trinity in the language of the New Testament. You cannot state the Calvinistic doctrine concerning sin—namely, of inherited guilt, of total depravity, of the imputation of Adam's sin—in the language of the New Testament. Therefore, it seems to me, we have an advantage here, so far as it goes. Moreover, it is very certain—at least it is certain to us—that if all the creeds, and all the teaching in accordance with the creeds, should cease to exist, and that if men should study only the New Testament, it would be impossible for them, by the simple reading of the New Testament, to find the doctrine of the Trinity or the Deity of Christ in that volume.

(2) Another reason for being a Unitarian is, that our views enable us, as we conceive, to believe *more* concerning God and Christ and the Bible and sin and salvation, than we could if we accepted the usual creeds

of the Church. We are not Unitarians in order to believe less, but we are Unitarians because Unitarianism opens wide the gate through which we can pass up and on into higher, larger, and nobler truths. We can believe *more* in the power of redeeming love and redeeming grace, *more* in the beauty and glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I do not say that we are more religious, or that we have more faith than those who differ from us; but I do say that we have the power, if we use it aright, of going down into a deeper religion and going up into a higher faith than if we were bound by the creeds of the Churches. Take, for example, the Trinity. We are able, as it seems to me, to believe more about God by omitting that doctrine; to have more faith in God, not less. For what is the Trinity but essentially a system of negations? The substance of the Trinity is this: that you must not believe this on that side, and you must not believe that on the other side, but something indefinite and undefined between. The Trinity declares that in the nature of the Deity there

are three persons, and that these three are one. But you must not suppose the three persons to be three persons in the sense in which three men are persons—in which Peter and James and John are three persons. You must not go as far as that on that side, and on the other side you must not believe that three persons are only three manifestations or three relations, or three modes of action of the Deity; you must believe more than that on the other side, and somewhere between you must stand, but exactly where we are never told. Now I say that to believe that is not to have a positive conviction, but only a negative belief. And if we demand the meaning of these terms—or subsistences, if you please—if we demand to have the definition in order to believe it, we are told that it is a mystery; it is a great mystery. And then if we say, 'If it is a mystery, then we cannot believe it,' we are told, 'Why not believe a mystery? You believe a great many things that are mysterious. You believe that the grass grows, and *that* is a mystery. You do not

know how it grows.' Then to that we always make the same reply, and that reply, to my mind, is perfectly satisfactory, and I have never heard any answer to it, and yet it is never accepted as an answer. If we are told that we believe that the grass grows, and it is a mystery because we do not know how it grows, we reply that the fact that the grass grows is not a mystery; it is a simple fact which we perfectly understand. *How* it grows is a mystery, and therefore we do not believe anything about the way in which the grass grows. We do not believe the how, because it is a mystery. We do believe that the grass grows; that is not a mystery. It is perfectly true, and must always be true, according to the constitution of the human mind, that where mystery begins the belief ends; and it ends just at that point. Suppose we set aside this whole doctrine as something which is the work of man, a system of metaphysics grown up in the Church; suppose we set it all aside, and then, instead of looking for God in this system of dialectics, in this logical

puzzle, we open our eyes and minds and hearts, and we find him everywhere in nature, in life, in all beauty, in all history. We see him in the slow, majestic processes of creation; we see him in the reaches of terrible power in the universe; we see him in the immense revolutions of the stars, and in the wonderful structure of the little insect, just perceptible to the most powerful microscope, on the leaf of the little plant; we see him in the long years which, in the geological ages, preceded the formation of this earth. Everywhere that Divine Power is working around us. We see it in all the beauty which is manifested in the mountains, clouds, and seas, and brooks, and sunrise; in all the history of the human race; in childhood, and youth, and society; in business, in pain, and in joy; in all the riches of the world; because in all of them there is some manifestation of the divine truth and love, and he has left no race and no family of mankind orphans, without some knowledge of himself. And in the soul, in the distinction between right and wrong born in us all,

in the vast idea of cause by which we go backward to the beginning of the universe, and in the great conception of the infinite by which we, little creatures of the dust and of the day, are able to reach out beyond all knowledge and all understanding, and grasp the eternal—in all these we find him. In this we have vastly more, not less, than in the belief that in the Godhead there are three persons, and yet those three persons are not three Gods, but one God, and that a person is more than a mode, but less than a personal man.

(3) And thus, too, in rejecting the technical and theological doctrine of the Deity of Christ, we do not believe Christ less divine, but more. To *say* that Christ is God, unless we know what we mean by it when we say it, does not show us God in Christ; does not make him a revelation of God. It is to see something divine in Christ which brings us to God; and that is what he came for—to bring us to God. To say that he is perfect God, and at the same time perfect man, confuses the mind, and leaves it in darkness and not in light.

But we see something of God in Christ whenever we see that the goodness of this highest child of earth, of this greatest of all human souls which God ever sent into this world, that his goodness must be a revelation of the Maker, because he comes nearer to the Maker than any other; and therefore in his goodness, in his daily life, in the happiness of his soul, we study and find more and more of the Deity. When we accept him as a pure man, as a simple man, made in all things like his brethren, and yet without sin, then we know that man was not meant to be a sinner, and that God did not make it necessary for man to sin, and that the time is surely to come in which men following Christ will rise above sin. When conscious of evil, conscious that we are ourselves sinners, doubting and distrusting the pardoning love of God, we open the New Testament, and we find Christ saying to the sinful woman, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go thy way; from henceforth sin no more'; when we find him saying, 'Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven,' making no

condition, but teaching that the moment we come in simplicity of heart, seeking for pardon, he loves to bestow it—in that we see something of the divine fatherly affection which comes to us through the eyes of Jesus, and shows to us that God also, when we come to him with the same longing for pardon, will say, as Jesus said, 'Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.' And so we find more of God in Christ, not less, because we do not embarrass ourselves by these technical and theological distinctions, but accept him as he appears everywhere to be—a simple man—a man who, by the Divine gift and help and inspiration, was able to rise till he came so near to God, that when we see him we catch something of the reflected light of the Deity shining in his face.

(4) And also, by setting aside all technical and theological views concerning the Holy Spirit, we can believe more, and not less, in the Holy Ghost. To us, God is so near to the human heart, he is so full of overflowing love for man, and he is so ready to bestow the best gifts on his

children, that it is a universal law, as universal and sure as the law of gravitation, that whenever we open our souls to him, seeking for his influence and help, and for what is true and what is right, something of that divine life will pass into our souls; that there is no accident in the gift of the Holy Spirit; that it does not come here to-day and there to-morrow; that it does not attend the path of some great revival; that it is not monopolized by. prophets, or saints, or the professors of any particular religion; but that it is everywhere, just as the sun shines and the rain falls on the evil and on the good, whenever they are ready to receive it. So God's love, God's truth, the influence of his Holy Spirit, descends into the heart, whether of saint or sinner, good man or bad, orthodox or heretic, the moment he, looking up, opens his soul and says, 'O Lord, help me to know thee, and be a better man!' Thus we can believe more, and not less, in the Holy Spirit by setting aside the old theology.

(5) And we can believe, as it seems to me,

more in the Bible, and not less, by not believing in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. We believe that those who wrote the Bible were inspired men, led and filled by the power of God; and we believe it because of the greatness of the book itself, because it has done so much and is doing so much. It must have God in it, else it could not do the work it has done. One of the chief proofs of the inspiration of the Bible is, that it is able to withstand the ten thousand perversions that have been put upon it. There is hardly an error or villainy but has been defended out of the Bible. The Bible has been made in our time to defend slavery. The Bible has been used to defend almost every wrong that man has ever practised on man. Most terrible doctrines have been taught out of it and defended out of it. Because Noah is reported, after he came out of the ark, to have cursed Canaan, it was argued that this is a proof that the negroes—who were not descended from Canaan—ought to be made slaves. Because to Noah it was declared that 'who-

soever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,' an argument was drawn from this in support of capital punishment. The Bible has been set against astronomy, science, and almost every discovery of man, and yet the Bible lives. That is a proof of its inspiration. It has so much good in it that it cannot be put down by its own friends; and there is nothing that has more occasion than the Bible to say, 'Save me from my friends.' But the Sermon on the Mount will never grow old; the Lord's Prayer rises to God every morning from the lips of infancy, and is chanted every day in the liturgies of nations; and there is nothing in human thought or in human love which is not fed and strengthened and helped out of the Bible. And because we see that, we believe in it. But we do not believe that the Bible came down from heaven translated into the English, and printed, and having the proof corrected, and being bound up, and coming to us in that inspired form. We believe it was liable to mistakes all the way through that

the men who wrote the Bible were not infallible, though they were inspired; that they saw some great truths and uttered them, and for the sake of those truths the Bible has lived and will live. But they were not free from mistakes. Consequently the Bible is a human book, only the best human book there is; and the Bible being a human book, we can read it freely as we read any other human book; and, if we find something we cannot understand, we may wait until we do understand it. If you find something that contradicts your moral sense, do not believe it; set it aside. You need not say it is false, because, perhaps, you do not understand what it is and what it means; but never accept anything, if it is in the Bible, as true, which you cannot see to be true, and never accept anything in the Bible to be good when it seems to be in contradiction to your moral sense; and so using the Bible, it will help you a thousand times more than if you make it a master and your mind its slave.

(6) The faith of Unitarians enables them

to believe more in all these ways. I do not say we do believe more than others, or that we have any more faith than others; but we have the power. We can also believe more fully in sin and the evil of sin than if we accepted the common doctrines about sin. The common doctrines about sin are theological doctrines, and they have a theological and metaphysical sound. They do not seem to bear on human life or conduct. When we are told that sin came into the world by Adam; and that through Adam we have become sinners; and that the sin we committed is Adam's sin; and that somehow or other Adam's sin is imputed to us; and that we inherit from our federal head the guilt of sin; and that somehow or other we are totally depraved, and yet are bound to do right, and are very sinful if we do wrong; that we cannot do anything of ourselves that is right, because no one ever does or can, but nevertheless we are bound to do right—when we are told these things, what is the effect on the mind as regards sin? The whole effect

is to make a man think that sin is a sort of metaphysical thing with which he has not anything to do—except perhaps in church. But when we consider that sin is that which separates us from the divine truth and divine love; that sin is falsehood, and that sin is selfishness; and that because God is true and God is love, then whenever we are selfish, and whenever we are false, we are separating ourselves from that divine Friend, and plunging downwards instead of going upwards—then we can understand the evil of sin.

(7) Moreover, I think, as Unitarians, we can believe more in punishment, and not less, than those who believe the theological doctrine. I do not believe in everlasting punishment, because it seems to me to be dishonourable to God. The doctrine of everlasting punishment, as it is held to-day, is, that man is sent into this world by his Maker in such a condition that he is capable of plunging himself into eternal ruin by what he can do in this world, so that he may reach a state in which he may be for ever and for ever a sufferer, without

any power of reform or return. Now, there is not a man—I will not say a good man, I will not say a saint—but there is not a decent man, with decent human feelings, who would be willing to be accused of such a thing as is thus ascribed to the Almighty. It is one of the saddest things in the world that theology can so pervert the common human sense and human heart that we can ascribe to the Infinite blessedness and the Infinite love that which we should consider disgraceful if performed by a human being. And therefore I say that we can believe more in punishment, and not less, when we see that punishment follows sin as its medicine intended for its cure. Since Jesus has taught us in this world that we are to overcome evil with good, therefore that we *can* overcome the evil with good, then the Lord who sent Jesus into this world must have as much power as he attributes to us here; and with his infinite good he must sooner or later overcome all evil. Feeling this, we can believe in punishment as a means of reform, and we can believe more in the

glory and beauty of the gospel, and in Jesus as the representative of good in this world, standing as the medium through whom God's love and light flow to us. We can believe more fully in it if we believe that he helps us with that divine power which is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God through him in this world or in any other world. We do not believe that the sovereignty of God is such a limited sovereignty that after man's death God is not able to do anything more to help him, but is shut out from his creature by the mere fact of his death, so that his love can no longer reach him. We do not believe that the sovereignty of God is a sovereignty which rules over one part of the universe, leaving the devil and his fiends and the sinners to have their own way in another part of the universe.

(8) Now I have shown you some of the reasons why I am a Unitarian. It is not because I wish to believe less in God, Christ, or religion, but because I wish to believe more; to have more faith in God,

more faith in man, more faith in Christ, more faith in religion, more faith in the Bible, and more faith in the triumph of divine love. It seems to me that our views are more intelligible than those which have been so carefully arranged on the metaphysical anvils of the Middle Ages. Those were hammered out with a great deal of skill and a great deal of care, but they are mediæval doctrines; they are an anachronism here at the present time. God has given to us all common sense, and when he speaks to us he speaks to our common sense. Christ rejoiced, not that his doctrines were mysterious, but that they were revelations; and he said, 'I thank thee, O Father, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding' (Matt. xi. 25)—who, probably, in those days as in these, were hemmed in and shut up by their metaphysical doctrines and theologies—'and didst reveal them unto babes.' That seems to me to be proof, so far as it goes, that the doctrine which is the most intelligible is likely to be the most true.

The Unitarian doctrine is also the most rational, because it does not demand of us to believe a contradiction.

(9) Unitarianism makes this a good world to live in, for it teaches that an infinitely good Being has made it for us, and an infinitely good Being has placed us here; and he is our providence, our shield, and our support evermore. It is a good religion also to die by. It is a good religion to die by, because it tells us it is a good thing to die: it is a good thing to die when death comes, and not a bad thing. Death is not the king of terrors to us. Death is a friend. Since God has sent death to all his creatures, just as he has sent life to all his creatures, death must be just as good, when it comes, as life while it remains. We believe in that Infinite love which is just the same in the other world that it is here. We believe that the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever, and not merely for the short span of human life. We believe that through all eternity, as through all time, we shall be surrounded by that divine

grace, and wrapt in the arms of that blessed tenderness; and that so we are safe everywhere while we trust in God and lean on him. And, as we find no little polyp in tropical seas brought into being, under the providence of God, without having a place arranged beforehand for its home, and having its food prepared for it beforehand, and all the conditions of life cared for carefully before it comes, we may be sure that when we, who are better than they, as Jesus tells us, and nearer to God than they, pass on in his providence into the other world, there will be at least an equal care for us there, and an equal arrangement made for our reception there, and homes as good and suited to all the needs of our nature there as here. Christ said to his disciples, 'In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.' So natural it was that they should believe it, that if it were not so he would have told them; but he hardly thought it worth while to tell them, since it was so. 'I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and pre-

pare a place for you, I come again and will receive you unto myself' (John xiv. 2, 3). We see in these words the evidence that in the other life, as here in this, there will be homes prepared and made ready for us; that the friendships of this life shall not come to an end here. Jesus could not live in heaven unless he had his human friends to be with him there. He could not drink the cup of joy alone in the heavenly world. 'I will come again to receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.' If even that holy life required for its full satisfaction and completeness that its earthly love should be carried over there, and that he should not be separated from his earthly friends in the heavenly world, we may be sure that the same divine law will apply to us and those whom we love.

These are the reasons, or some of them, for which I am ready still to call myself a Unitarian.

STRONG POINTS OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY [1]

As some of my readers belong, most likely, to orthodox Churches, it may be desirable to say just a word or two on the motives and objects with which this tract is written.

In the first place, we think, as Unitarian Christians, that a little regard for ourselves calls for some such step as this. As you must be well aware, in one respect at least we resemble the first disciples—we are 'a sect everywhere spoken against.' If I were to collect together some of the hard things which have been said of us, and the railing accusations which have been brought against us, it would only serve to show how unjust and uncharitable men professing to be actuated by the purest spirit of Christian love can be when they are under the influence of theological

[1] By William Gaskell.

prejudice. This I would rather not do; both because it is sad to think that good and pious men, as numbers of those so treating us have been, should have done us this wrong, and because I believe that very often it was 'in ignorance they did it.' Enough to say that we are still regarded with something like suspicion and distrust; that an imaginary circle of terror is drawn around us, which keeps other religionists from ever approaching us, and learning what our faith really is; and makes them feel, as an eminent Independent minister (Dr. Vaughan) once expressed it, that it would be 'an incoherence, a levity, a treason' in them to 'admit us to any sort of companionship' which would be a recognition of us as 'Christian brethren.' Now, if you were in our case what would you do? Believing that you were grossly misrepresented and misunderstood, would you not try to put yourselves right? Seeing that through a false and injurious conception you were excluded from the fellowship of those with whom you would fain walk in sympathy and love,

would you not endeavour to show them that they had read you wrongly, and were shunning you without a cause? Fully persuaded that you had as clear a right to sit at the Master's feet, and claim to be his disciples as they could have, would you not feel called upon to let them see that they were treating you unjustly in thrusting you aside and denying you his honoured name, and, as Paul had to do to certain zealots of his day, bid them, if they thought themselves Christ's, think this again, that as they were Christ's, even so were you Christ's? In a word, like the Apostle, 'being defamed' would you not 'entreat'? Assuredly you would. This, then, forms one motive for writing this tract. We, naturally, do not like to labour under unmerited opprobrium. We desire to stand fair with our fellow-Christians, and not have our name cast out as evil. We want to fight side by side with them, under the same holy banner, against the deadly foes which we see trampling down so many of our brethren. This, I think, you will admit to be right.

In the next place, a regard for our fellow-disciples calls us to the same course. We have constant occasion to see that they speak unkindly of us, and stand aloof from us, and refuse to co-operate with us, simply because they know so little what our faith really is. Representations are still continually made of it so utterly wide of the truth that they would be ridiculous if they were not mischievous, if they did not divide those who ought to be one, and keep up miserable wrangling where there should be Christian fellowship and love. It seems to us, therefore, that we are not doing our duty if we suffer this hindrance to stand in the way of that 'unity of spirit in the bond of peace' in which all friends of the gentle, meek, and merciful Saviour should be linked together. This makes us anxious to disperse the mists which the rancorous breath of theological hatred has raised around us, so that, instead of being viewed through this distorting medium, we may be seen more truly as we are. We feel persuaded that both parties would gain by this, and Christ's holy Church be

the better for it. It would, we believe, be a help towards the fulfilment of his prayer that all his disciples might be 'one,' as he and his Father were 'one.' This too, I am sure, is a motive which will approve itself to every one of you as right and good.

Further, a regard to Christian truth calls us to the same course. By doing as our Lord bids us—'searching the Scriptures,' and 'judging of our own selves what is right'—we have been brought to the conclusion that in the course of ages—many of them, we know, ages of grossest darkness and superstition—'the faith once delivered to the saints' has been obscured by the influences of a 'false philosophy' and a proud, usurping sacerdotalism, and that its original power has thereby been weakened, and prejudices have been excited against it in the minds of many who would have received it gladly if it had been presented to them in its native simplicity and beauty. We have met with not a few such; minds that after they had been driven out into the dreary wilderness of

unbelief, and sought for a refuge in other forms of faith in vain, have found it in what seems to us the true Gospel of Christ. Put yourselves, then, in our place, and what would you do? Truckle to worldly expedience? let the fear of man take you in its snare? hold your peace, and let what you felt to be error go unchecked on its way? 'No!' you would say; 'the light which God has given us we dare not put under a bushel. We are followers of One who "came to bear witness to the truth," and for it died on the cross, and by our allegiance to him, come weal, come woe, we are bound to advance what we hold to be his truth as far as in us lies. This simple Christian faithfulness demands.' So would *you* say, and so say *we*. There is here a plain duty before us, and, by God's grace, we mean to fulfil it.

What we seek is, not so much to controvert the opinions of others as to set forth our own; not to display what is false and hurtful in the systems we reject, but to show what is true and good in that which we hold; not to take up the subject

in a spirit of antagonism, but in the spirit of love.

Trusting, then, that there may be some among you who have the love of justice which will lead you to look into the cause of the misrepresented, and the noble spirit of independence that characterized the Bereans of old, which will induce you to put away all idle fears, and search and see whether the things which we declare are so, I now proceed to the subject of this tract. And as a foundation for what I have to say, I would take the sixth verse of the eighth chapter of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, where he writes :—

> To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in (*for*) him ; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by (*through*) whom are all things, and we by (*through*) him.

These words embody the leading peculiarities of the Unitarian Christian's faith, and what I wish is to bring under your candid consideration one or two of the 'strong points,' as they appear to me, of that faith, and leave you to judge for

yourselves what their argumentative and moral force really is.

(1) In the first place, then, it has the advantage over the systems to which it is opposed, of having *its fundamental principles set forth in the very words of Scripture.* Its distinguishing doctrine is that 'God is One,' without any distinction of parts or persons; and, as I need hardly say, it is from our belief in the strict and simple Unity of God that we derive our name. Now, this essential article of our faith can be expressed in the words of Scripture without the least straining or altering of any kind whatever. The passage just read from one of the great Apostle's letters is a case in point. Had it been his object to state distinctly what our views on this subject are, and to guard them as much as possible from misconception, he could hardly have used terms better suited to the purpose. As if bearing in mind the treachery of words, he employs them here with singular care and caution; and it so happens that he does this most in regard to those points of our faith which are

most controverted. He might almost have had a prophetic foresight of the perversion which was hereafter to be made of the simple doctrine of the Divine Unity, and the pretensions which so-called orthodoxy would put forth, and have been anxious to place on record his protest against them. Even Trinitarians avow that there is only 'one God,' but they endeavour to show that in this one God there are three Persons —Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—each separately, no less than altogether, that one God—a 'Trinity in Unity.' Such is the teaching of creeds and catechisms. But mark, now, the teaching of Paul, and observe the contrast. 'To us,' he says, 'there is but one God'; so far the Trinitarian agrees with him; but when he adds that this God is 'the Father,' and distinguishes him from the 'one Lord, Jesus Christ,' he departs from what the Trinitarian holds to be true, and propounds exactly the same view that the Unitarian takes. Let any member of an orthodox Church, adopting that view, assert that, in the proper sense of the term, 'the Father'

is the one only God whom he recognizes, and he will soon find that he is set down as 'unsound in the faith.' And I conceive that if the Apostle himself were to reappear, and affirm that doctrine in any other phraseology than that which he has used, he too would be shunned as tainted with heresy, and might, very likely, be denied, as we sometimes are, the Christian name. 'To us,' he says, 'there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things.' Not the faintest hint does he give of any Trinity being hidden in this Unity; nay, such a notion is effectually shut out by the terms he employs; 'to us there is but one God,' and that 'one God' is not the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of the Trinitarian, but simply 'the Father,' as worshipped by the Unitarian. The 'one God' of the former is a Triune God, or a God consisting of three Persons; the 'one God' of the first Churches, and of modern Unitarian Christians, is 'the Father' only, one Person, supreme above all. He stands first and alone, and our 'Lord Jesus Christ,' the agent of his will

in the reconstruction of all things, is separated and distinguished from him as clearly as language can do it; and the Apostle could not have more positively informed us that the Son and the Holy Ghost are not God, in the true and highest sense of the term, if he had said this in so many words. Similar remarks would apply to the language of Peter in his address to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, where he says, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him.' Could we, if we were to try our utmost, more plainly discriminate between Jesus and God who worked by him; could we, that is, more clearly express the Unitarian view? I see not how. And so I might say of other apostolic statements. But if you have any doubt still left, turn to the Master of whom all Christians profess to learn, and listen to him. With just as much exactness as his Apostles he distinguishes between himself and God and as decisively asserts the Unity and sole Deity of the

Father. 'This,' he says, in the solemn prayer which he offered up a little while before his death—'this is life eternal, that they might know thee,' his Father and our Father, 'the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' Could words be plainer? According to them, 'the Father' is 'the only true God.' Observe, he is not merely spoken of as 'God,' but as 'the only true God,' and Jesus is distinguished from him as the sent is from the sender, the messenger from the one who employs him; and it is so important to 'know' God in this light that it is connected with 'eternal life.' Verily, if we were disposed to retaliate on our Trinitarian brethren for their harsh treatment of us, we might make out a strong and telling case against them for their clear departure from the plainest declarations of Scripture. But this we have no wish to do; to their own Master they stand or fall. They cannot, however, deny that the foundation-doctrine of our faith, that there is but one God, and that one God 'the Father,' is established in the

express words of Jesus and his great Apostles. This being the case, of course, if language is to retain its meaning, all that is said by our theological opponents respecting the existence of three Persons in God, and the Deity of Christ and the Holy Ghost, falls to the ground; because if 'the Father' is 'the only true God,' unquestionably there can be no other God besides. Our Trinitarian brethren, I am bold to affirm, can make out no such case in their favour. They can find no passages of Scripture which even seem to state their doctrine. The single text (I John v. 7) about the three Heavenly Witnesses, which most nearly amounts to such a statement, is now, as you must be aware, given up by all Biblical critics as spurious, having been inserted centuries after the Epistle was written.[1] But even were it genuine, it says nothing about a Trinity of equal Persons. The words which have been added are these: 'there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these

[1] The words are omitted from the Revised Version.

three are one.' This no more necessarily implies that God is a Trinity of equal Persons, than the prayer of our Lord for his disciples, 'that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us,' implies a plurality of equal persons, or the deification of Christians. So that taking the Scriptures in the Authorised Version, without entertaining the question whether they have in any places been altered, we shall find that, while Unitarian views can be expressed in their very words, no clear statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, or even plausible materials for such a statement, can be extracted from their pages. And the insertion of a spurious passage which might answer the purpose—if it did not arise from the mistake of some copyist, who carried a marginal note into the text—is not without its significance. Be this, however, as it may, the fact remains patent to all, that Unitarian Christianity is plainly and unequivocally taught in the language of Scripture. Without any straining or

qualification whatever, our main doctrine, the distinguishing peculiarity of Unitarian Christianity, is expressed in the very words of Christ and his Apostles; and therefore, unlike others, we have no creed but the Bible, and if any sect of Christians are entitled to be called 'Evangelical,' we certainly are.

(2) Another of our 'strong points' is to be found in *the faith of the universal Church.* It is an article in the creed of all Christians that 'God is One.' Without any exception, they profess to believe in the Divine Unity. In as far as they really do so, they are, of course, Unitarians. This is a testimony of great importance. It amounts to this, that in the opinion of Catholics and Protestants alike, there is truly and properly 'but one God.' On the strength of this, some Trinitarian theologians maintain that the term 'Unitarian' is not specially descriptive of our belief. They are Unitarians as well as we, and in their own conception as much as we; and therefore, they contend, the name does not belong exclusively to us, and ought not to be appropriated exclusively by us. They do

not allege that it is unsuitable to us, but that it belongs likewise to them, and consequently has nothing distinctive in it. This is a remarkable concession in our favour. It is an admission that the great doctrine to which we do homage is true. By the concurrent acknowledgment of all Christian Churches, there is 'but one God.' So far, therefore, according to the confession of our warmest opponents, we are right. We agree with every other denomination in holding the doctrine of the Divine Unity. In respect, also, to the person of Jesus we agree with most of them —with all of them indeed but the Swedenborgian—in believing him to have been a true human being—'very man.' They, as well as we, look upon him as one born of a woman, 'made in all things like unto his brethren,' 'tempted in all points even as we are,' who wept real tears, who endured real pains, and who shared in all the innocent feelings and infirmities of our nature; in a word, we believe, as they do, that the life he lived was a real human life, and the death he died a real human death.

Here again, then, we have the suffrages of nearly all other Christians in our favour. We are right, it seems, in regarding our Saviour as a true and noble man: whom God sent into the world to do his will, to whom he gave power and authority, and whom he acknowledged as his beloved, because ever-obedient Son. Our Trinitarian brethren, I need hardly say, stop not in either of these cases where we do. They complicate the doctrine that God is One by attributing to him a plurality of Persons, and they complicate the doctrine that Jesus was human by attributing to him a divine, that is, a superhuman nature; and they expend a vast amount of subtle reasoning in trying to reconcile these contradictory views, and then, somewhat inconsistently, they charge us who take the simple Scripture teaching just as it stands, with 'pride of reason,' because we cannot bring our reason to bow to theirs. Still, they admit and sanction our fundamental principles. In fact, they cannot do otherwise. According to their own showing, as well as ours, God is One, and

the Lord Jesus Christ truly and properly a man. In these points, then, our faith, as far as it goes, is right. If it has any fault, it is that of defect; but its principles in themselves are good. This, evidently, must be granted. We reject nothing but what we deem inconsistent with these first, plain teachings of the gospel, or with others that are equally clear, and held with similar unanimity by all Christians alike. Our position among the Churches is well defined. It is the central ground where the lines of divine truth meet; yet, strange to say, it is assailed on every side as if it were the encampment of an enemy. We hold the great doctrines which are held by all the disciples of Christ in common; yet we are abused by all, because with these doctrines we will not blend the peculiarities which seem to us directly to contradict them, and not a little to lessen their power. We cannot, for instance, reconcile the doctrine that the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God, with the belief that 'there is but one God, the Father'; nor the doctrine that Christ is God, which

makes him infinite, with the belief that he was a Man, which makes him finite. The two sets of ideas appear to us to be destructive of each other, and to lead only to confusion and perplexity. We have here, therefore, no alternative left us but to dissent from orthodox teaching. The case is the same in regard to the remaining articles of our faith. We agree with all other Christians in believing that the God who made us is kind and gracious, and in attributing to him the bestowment of every good and perfect gift; but this prevents us from holding with them that he has attached to our nature the taint of original sin, the condition of moral helplessness, and the curse of eternal perdition. We agree with them in believing that a solemn responsibility attends whatever we do, and that we have a conscience to direct us to that which is right; but this prevents us from holding with them that we are naturally incapable of turning to what is good, utterly depraved, and hopelessly lost. We agree with them in believing, according to the plain declarations of our

Lord, that our condition hereafter will be determined by our characters, not our creed or profession; but this prevents us from holding with them that unless a man thinks in a particular way on certain points he must 'without doubt perish everlastingly.' We agree with them in believing that God is 'our Father,' full of love and compassion; but this prevents us from holding with them that he is the implacable enemy of countless myriads, and will torment them through ages without end, because they acted according to the nature which he himself had given them, and the grace was withheld that was essential to their salvation. In short, holding fast by the great central principles of faith which nearly all maintain, we reject only those extreme views which diverge on every side from the common ground of our profession, and are opposed to one or other of its great leading doctrines. For most of our views, therefore, we have the entire sanction of Christians of other persuasions. Our belief in the Unity of God, and the humanity of Christ—our

sense of duty and obligation—our trust in God as our Father—our hope of future blessedness—our feelings of veneration and worship—and all the acts of justice, kindness, and love that we render to our fellow-men have the approval of the whole Church of Christ. On these and various other grounds, we may appeal with confidence to every class of our fellow-Christians. By their own confession, Unitarian Christianity is true; for they, as well as we, declare that God is One, that Jesus was a 'man who told the truth which he had heard of God,' that those are his disciples who live in love and peace, that the true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and that God will render to every man according to his works.—And here, as bearing on the charge often brought against our faith that it is a system of mere negations, we might ask, Is it a mere negation that in God we have a Father, whose care for us never slumbers, whose love to us never wearies, in whose almighty protection we feel that we are safe, whether we live or whether we die?

Is not the negation rather with those who, raising up a cloud of inventions round this great central truth, cause it, instead of shining forth brightly as it does in the Gospels, to appear 'like the sun under dim eclipse'? Is it a mere negation to affirm, with the Psalmist, that God hath made us a little lower than the angels that are in heaven, and crowned us with glory and honour; that he has made us to know, and love and serve him, and that in order to this end he has created us in his own image, and formed us for immortal blessedness? Is not the negation rather with those who represent him as having made us even lower than the brutes, which at least are not born in sin, 'deserving his wrath and damnation'; made us, not in his own likeness, but as far as possible from it, *incapable* even of good, and fit only for perdition? And so I might go through all our positive views, in agreement with the plain teachings of Scripture, and show that the negation is not really with us, but most generally with those who condemn us. To express our belief, we

take the very words of Christ and his Apostles. Surely, no one will say there is negation in that!

(3) Another 'strong point' we have which seems to me impregnable. No amount of misrepresentation or abuse can dispossess us of it. *Our principles have their root in human nature.* They are more in harmony with reason and with conscience than those which are commonly preached as orthodox. The abetters of some religious systems seem to consider it a merit that they do violence to the faculties which the inspiration of the Almighty hath given us. Their idea would appear to be, that the farther they can diverge from human feeling and sentiment, the nearer will they approach to the divine. This arises from their believing that all men at their birth are thoroughly vile—corrupt in every power and affection they possess. It is perfectly consistent with such a belief that they should distrust their own hearts, and suspect the dictates of their understanding and conscience. There is, therefore, a sort of conflict per-

petually going on between their natural sentiments and their artificial theology. Not holding any such doctrine, we take part with human nature in the struggle; and instead of pouring contempt on the reason and affections that God has given us, which seems very like impeaching his goodness, we think that they ought to be reverenced and honoured. As we have already seen, with regard to the great doctrine that 'God is One,' the Scriptures are clearly on our side. His Unity, in opposition to the 'gods many' of heathenism, is distinctly set forth in the Old Testament, and, in opposition to any other claims, no less distinctly in the New. Nature on this point is in harmony with the Bible. In all departments of science one plan, one purpose, one presiding mind is manifest. The laws in operation show that one Author framed them. The heavenly bodies move in one direction, and as one system; one principle of attraction governs all their motions; they are related to one great scheme; the same Spirit worketh in all. Our natural intel-

ligence vouches for the same truth; repudiates the contradictory notions involved in the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, 'at which,' as an eminent dignitary of the English Church once said, 'reason stands aghast,' and bears its testimony for one God only. There remains to contend for the former nothing but a perverted theology. And against all this light what has it to allege? Merely a heap of metaphysical refinements, and a few obscure passages of Scripture patched up into a plausible form, and imposed on men's souls by the forged authority of the Church. It is really amazing to consider the weakness of the case which Trinitarianism has to put. As if conscious of this, it has generally denounced reason, shrunk from light, and worked by fear; and what was wanting in evidence it has made up in confident assertion and vague appeals to authority. But all through the controversy the natural sentiments are in favour of Unitarian views. If you tell men that they come into the world with a depraved and ruined nature, utterly disinclined to

good and bent on nothing but evil, their own consciousness testifies against your doctrine. They feel that it is neither just to their Maker nor true of themselves. Liable as they are to go astray, they know that they are not thus devilish and desperately wicked. Admitting, as they must, that they are not what they should be, they still feel that God has not left himself without witness in their hearts, and that it is not his fault, nor Adam's fault, but their own fault that they are no better. It is vain to tell them that God is wroth with them, and dooms them to endless woe for being born in a condition which unfitted them altogether for duty, and necessitated them to do evil only; or that he would on no account be reconciled to a single one of them, though all his children, till his anger was appeased by the blood of his innocent and beloved Son. Violence must be done to the natural sense of equity (which, remember, God has implanted) before such doctrines can be really believed. And the grievous result, in many instances, of demanding from men assent to what their

reason tells them is false, and their moral sense tells them is wrong, is, to undermine their faith, and leave it little better than a hollow profession. Nor will any that are not mystified, or frightened into submission, admit that all who have not felt the utter ruin of their nature, and their need of an infinite atonement for their sins, must, however pure, devout, and loving, be punished with pains everlasting. In short, for nearly every doctrine of the Unitarian faith, and against those peculiar to the Trinitarian, we shall find a witness-bearer in the human heart ; and the effect would be more evident than it is, if there were not so many menaces and subterfuges employed to overawe and enslave the natural sentiments of the mind. It is obvious, however, to all impartial inquirers, that our views inspire a more generous confidence in human nature, and a greater reliance on its dictates.

This, I repeat, is one of our 'strong points.' We have no need to coerce and constrain the moral powers by force, or to trick and cajole them into submission ;

they are with us already; and we ask nothing for the faith we preach but a free and full examination of it. We say that God is One, not Three in One; we say that Christ was a true, real, noble man, not a person in the Trinity, equal with the Father, of whom he affirmed he 'is greater than I'; we say that we are born weak and fallible, but not tainted with sin, and ordained to depravity and hell: that we are created capable of good, and that our mission is to promote it; that no power in existence can defile our souls, or ruin our hopes, without our own concurrence: that freedom of thought and action is our birthright, and to 'prove all things, that we may hold fast that which is good,' our unquestionable privilege; we say that true religion is a matter of loving choice, not of fear and constraint; we say that all things, under the guidance of our Heavenly Father's care, are tending to fit us for the blessedness of a better world—we say this; and the natural sentiments, which are of God, re-echo and confirm what we say.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY [1]

THERE is a well-known saying of Kant's to the effect that whenever he looked up to the stars in the midnight heavens, or looked down into the depths of his own soul, and found there a law of duty, bidding him do this, or not do the other, the sense of awe was stirred within him. This feeling is widespread, nay, almost universal. Men of all nations and climes, at all periods of the world's history—poets, philosophers, men of science, men of business—all have shared in it. And most of them have been led on beyond this vague feeling of awe to the belief that there is some Power or some Being in and behind Nature greater than all else, on

[1] By James Harwood, B.A.

whom they all depend. This is no mere modern feeling, nor is it confined to civilized nations. The old Pagan mythologies, the remains of ancient temples, the selection of priestly castes, the worship of heavenly bodies, all testify to the existence of the faculty of reverence within man, and the belief in a Being outside man, towards whom that reverence is directed. It is this twofold element which constitutes religion in its broadest sense.

DEVELOPMENT IN RELIGION

Religion is one; religions are many. It could not be otherwise. As men advance in civilization and knowledge, so does their religion take higher and more spiritual form. From the worship of a multitude of deities, they advance to the worship of a smaller number, and at last to the worship of one Supreme Being, who unites in himself the various powers and attributes hitherto ascribed to a family or senate of gods. Moreover, while the number of gods is thus reduced, their

character is also elevated. At first, they are dreaded for their cruelty, feared for their power, and flattered with a view to their favour; later, they are gradually invested in the thoughts of men with those moral qualities which they are themselves beginning to value and to cultivate—they are revered for their justice, and, in the highest stage, loved for their goodness. The image of God in the soul of man varies with the nature and condition of the mirror that reflects it. It is impossible to worship what is beneath ourselves. Worship can only be offered to what is best; and, as soon as men feel the beauty of holiness, they count holiness among the essential attributes of God. So with all the other great qualities—justice, truth, mercy, love.

There are many religions, we have said: but among them are three which agree in one most important respect, namely, the belief in one God. These three *Monotheistic* religions are the Jewish, the Christian, the Mohammedan.

With the first and last we are not now concerned. The second is distinguished from them by its historical and spiritual relation to a particular religious prophet—Jesus of Nazareth—and by the truths which it has received through him. The essential elements of Christianity are, not only that God is one—the Jew and the Mohammedan also say that—but that he is the Father of all men, and that therefore all men are brethren. This dear relationship between God and man at once places our duties to him and to each other on a new footing, and gives a distinctive character to Christian worship and to Christian ethics. The revelation—for we may truly call it such—is distinctive, not only in its contents, but in the mode of its presentation. Not in a creed to be believed, nor in a ritual to be observed, nor even in a code of duties to be performed, was the religion of Jesus set forth, but in a life whose grace and majesty, beauty and tenderness, though

sadly belied alas! by many professing disciples, have yet been the inspiration of all that is noblest in Christendom. This life of Christ, though Christians may interpret it and account for its significance in many different ways, is the magnetic power which draws them all together in reverent love and aspiration around a central ideal and a unique example.

In the present day, perhaps more than ever, is this Life producing a unity of spirit, which may eventually gather into one fold the many Churches and sects into which the Christian world is divided.

UNITARIAN AND TRINITARIAN

But while all Christians are united in reverence for the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, and agree moreover in this, that God is one and that he is the Father of all mankind, yet there are many devout followers of Jesus who also maintain that there are three persons in the Godhead, and that Christ is one of these. They believe in the Unity of God; they believe

also in 'the Trinity in Unity,' as it is called. Such persons are called 'Trinitarians'; they call themselves 'Orthodox.' Those who uphold the older belief that God is one, and who look to Jesus as their religious Leader, a man that led the noblest life and taught the sublimest faith the world has ever known; who deny the existence of three persons in the Godhead, are called 'Unitarians.'[1] They are denounced as 'heretics,' and are by many even denied the name of Christian. Nay, there have been some who would refuse them also any exclusive right to the name Unitarian, on the ground that they themselves are Unitarians, inasmuch as with all other Christians they hold the doctrine of the Unity of God. Nothing can be less profitable than a dispute about mere names, and we cannot stay to pursue it. It is far more important to consider how the doctrine of the 'Trinity in Unity' came to be added to, and in popular apprehension, at least, to supersede the ancient doctrine of both the Old and the

[1] See Note p. 149.

New Testament, that God is one. Meanwhile, it is well to remember that the characteristic doctrine held by Unitarians, from which their name is derived, is common to all Christians, and indeed to all Monotheists.

UNSECTARIAN CHRISTIANITY

There is therefore much ground for the assertion frequently made that 'Unsectarian Christianity resolves itself into mere Unitarianism.' So much the better for Unitarianism, one would naturally suppose. What are the other elements needful in order to bring Unsectarian Christianity to the level of a Christianity which is Sectarian? What must be added to Unitarianism that it may become 'Orthodox'? Many additions are needful for which the Unitarian can find no warrant either in Scripture or in Reason, which are repugnant to his conscience, and contrary to his views of God's dealings with mankind.

ORTHODOX SCHEME OF DOCTRINE

The doctrine of the Trinity does not stand by itself. It belongs to a connected scheme or body of dogma, of which the several parts depend upon each other.

Beginning with the 'Fall of man' from a supposed state of perfection, the scheme tells us that Adam and all his descendants to the end of time became subject to the wrath of God. A sin having been committed by finite man against the infinite God, is said to be infinite; as such, it necessitates an infinite satisfaction, and until this has been exacted the curse of God rests upon every man 'that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam.' It is impossible, however, for man, who is finite, to offer this infinite satisfaction; it is equally impossible—so we are told—for God to forgive man until the satisfaction has been given. Thus there is a deadlock: God and man are alienated from each other. Yet God continued, it is said, to create men doomed beforehand to death and eternal perdition—men who

were born into a hopeless condition, which they had no power to alter. The only possible escape from this state of affairs is that an Infinite being should take upon himself the sins of mankind, and pay the penalty which God inexorably demands. Thus a second Infinite being is required, and hence Jesus Christ is said to be God the Son, with whom God the Father made a covenant. Through faith in his atoning blood men may appropriate to themselves a share in his redeeming work, and escape from the wrath into the love of the heavenly Father; all who fail to fulfil this condition must, at the very least, remain outside 'the covenanted mercies.'

Such is the outline, without note or comment, of the common and, so to say, official Orthodox scheme of salvation, which especially claims for itself to be the 'peculiar' doctrine of the gospel of Jesus. It is in vain to say that it violates our notions of the justice, to say nothing of the love, of God, for justice, we are told, means one thing with God, and something

else with man. It is useless to urge that we cannot conceive how Jesus Christ can be at once God and man, finite and infinite; or how, while God is one, there can be three persons in the Godhead; for these, we are warned, are mysteries to be believed, but not understood. And, indeed, many of the upholders of this scheme appear to consider as one of its great merits, and as a mark of its supernatural origin, that it is beyond the wit or wisdom of man to discover it for himself, or even to comprehend it when it has been discovered for him. Herein, it is said, lies the distinction between natural and revealed religion.

Be it so; the Unitarian, no less than the Trinitarian, recognizes the existence of mystery and the necessity of faith. If 'Philosophy without assumptions' (at least, the assumption that the human faculties are veracious) is impossible, Religion without trust is no less so. On every side, not only in the sphere of religion, but in the spheres of history, of politics, of everyday life, of science itself, are we compelled

to recognize facts which we cannot explain, and to act upon grounds which fall far short of certainty. The mystery of pain, the delight in beauty, the longing for the ideal, the yearning of love, all testify to what lies 'too deep for words,' and reveal a world most real to us, yet beyond our power fully to comprehend. Therefore no reflecting man will reject the Trinity or any other doctrine on the ground *simply* that it is a mystery.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IN A REVELATION

Yet, at the same time, if we are called upon to believe a doctrine, not because it commends itself to our reason and conscience, but on the authority of a definite divine revelation, we, at least, have the right, nay, we are bound, to assure ourselves that it really has been revealed. If the subject of the revelation transcends our faculties, that is only the greater reason why it should be given clearly and emphatically, and not left to the chances of ambiguous expression or doubtful inference. A revelation as

such, fails in its purpose, so far as it leaves earnest, truth-loving men in doubt and disagreement as to the matters which it actually proclaims. Of course, many things may be true and even of the first importance without forming part of the revelation. But in its own subject-matter a revelation, to be worthy of the name, should be so clear in its utterance, that all men, who are capable of understanding, shall be able to agree as to what it really does say; otherwise, it is ineffective. It would seem, therefore, that only those matters can be regarded as essential to Christianity, which by common consent form part of the original revelation. 'Our Common Christianity,' or 'Unsectarian Christianity,' then, so far from being an insignificant trifle hardly worth noticing, is just that portion of our religion which lay so near the heart of its founder, and which he enforced with such impressiveness that no one can question that it belongs to his revelation. Even those persons who, on other grounds, may be unable to accept the belief or teaching, will not

doubt the historical fact that he imparted it. There are many elements in the teaching of Jesus which are so clear and unmistakable that 'he who runs may read,' for example, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Can the same be said of the doctrine of the Trinity? I venture to say that it cannot, and in the following pages reasons are given for saying so. The matter may be put in the form of a syllogism, as follows:—

The essentials of a revelation must be stated clearly and directly by its founder.

Jesus did not state the doctrine of the Trinity clearly and directly.

Therefore the doctrine of the Trinity is not one of the essentials of the revelation made by Jesus.

And yet the very ground on which our acceptance of the belief is demanded is that it was divinely communicated through Jesus Christ!

But, apart from this question of revelation, the real objection to the doctrine of the Trinity is, not that it lies beyond reason, but that it contradicts reason. I

give up the attempt to compass the Infinite; but so long as I think at all, I cannot believe that the same Being can have two sets of attributes that are absolutely inconsistent with each other. This seems to me to be not a mystery, but a contradiction.

When therefore an orthodox believer presents to me his scheme of salvation, and requires me to accept it, on pain of suffering civil disabilities in this world and eternal torture in the world to come, I am at least entitled to ask on what authority he proceeds. He does not pretend to appeal to my reason or conscience; where then am I to find that which is to supersede them? If I address that question to a Protestant he will no doubt refer me to the Bible; a Catholic would refer me to the Church as the interpreter of the Bible. In both cases therefore the Bible is regarded as the sacred ark containing the divine truth.

THE BIBLE

The question of the seat of authority in religion, which is of fundamental importance, need not be discussed in the present essay. It would probably be true to say of most Unitarians of the present day, that though they have a profound regard for the Scriptures, they do not accept their binding and final authority in the same way as most orthodox persons accept it. But their reason for this should not be misunderstood. As a matter of fact, the earlier Unitarians (in modern times) were rigid Scripturalists, and abandoned orthodoxy solely because, as they maintained, it was not sanctioned by the Bible. Since their time mighty influences have been at work. A century of critical, historical, and scientific investigation could not pass by without throwing much light upon the composition of the Bible, and opening up other sources of knowledge with which it must be compared. Moreover, a deeper religious philosophy has led Christians of all schools to place less reliance on mere

external testimony to doctrine, and to rest with greater confidence on the moral and spiritual nature of man.[1] Hence the habit of fortifying doctrines by passages from Scripture taken indiscriminately is now much less common than in days gone by.

But since the doctrine of the Trinity is still widely believed *on the supposed authority of the Bible,* we may profitably inquire whether any such authority really exists.

THE TRINITY NOT IN THE BIBLE

One fact strikes us at the very outset. The doctrine of the Unitarian pervades the Bible in clear and unmistakable language, while that of the Trinitarian, at best, can only be inferred from isolated passages. Neither the word Trinity nor any other word of similar meaning is to be found anywhere within the Old or New Testament. Nowhere is it stated that

[1] Cp., for example, Dr. Martineau's 'Seat of Authority in Religion' and Bishop Gore's Bampton Lecture on the Incarnation.

the Godhead is one in essence, but contains three coequal persons. Those who profess to follow the Bible most implicitly are obliged to use language which is non-Biblical when they set forth their doctrine. Still, a few passages are appealed to in support of the doctrine. To what do they amount?

1. We are reminded that one of the words used in the Hebrew for God is always used in the plural, and from this fact the inference is drawn that the writer had in his mind the idea of a plurality of persons. 'In the beginning *gods* created the heaven and the earth.' 'Behold the man is become as one of *us*, to know good and evil.' It is to be remembered, however (1) that with this plural substantive the verb is used in the singular, thus showing that only one person is referred to; (2) that this use of a plural form with a singular meaning is a well-known Hebrew idiom. Its application is not confined to God, but occurs also when men, or even creatures below man are referred to. It was, in fact, a device for expressing majesty

or extraordinary size. Thus, when Eleazar first met Rebekah, he is told she shall be a wife to the son of thy *masters* (Genesis xxiv. 51). Yet no one suggests that three Abrahams are here referred to, any more than that our own King is tripersonal, because in royal proclamations he uses the plural 'we.' There is a very conclusive proof that the foregoing explanation is the true one. Those who use the Hebrew as their native language surely ought to understand it, and yet the Jews, although constantly familiar with this plural form 'gods,' never so much as thought of its implying a Trinity.

2. In the New Testament there are two, and only two passages, in which the expressions, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit occur together. One is at the close of Matthew's Gospel (xxviii. 19): 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in (or, into) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

It may be doubted whether Jesus himself instructed his disciples to use this formula;

at all events, it never occurs in the accounts of any of the baptisms mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, or in the Epistles. But quite apart from this, we have here no mention of a Trinity, for it will hardly be maintained that because three terms occur together, they therefore denote three distinct and coequal persons, that constitute one Being. There is nothing to prevent any Unitarian from using this formula. Similar phraseology occurs in the well-known benediction, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.' But again, not the least sanction is given here to the idea that there are three distinct and co-equal persons in the Godhead.

I need not refer to the text of the three heavenly witnesses (I John v. 7 in the Authorized Version). This verse was long known to be corrupt, and is now repudiated by the scholars who have given us the Revised Version. The fact, however, that it was inserted is not without significance, as it shows how strongly the need was felt

for some clear Scriptural warrant for the doctrine of the Trinity.

So much, or rather so little, for the direct evidence. Unitarians are often rebuked for their presumption in trusting to 'carnal reason,' and summoned to believe the clear statements of the Bible, and yet, it appears that not a single passage occurs which plainly asserts the 'Trinity in Unity.' Whatever evidence may be alleged in favour of the doctrine is indirect, consisting simply of inferences, drawn by that fallible reason of which so many hard things are said.

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE AGAINST

But this is not all. In both the Old and New Testaments, passages whose genuineness is undisputed, literally abound that are inconsistent with this doctrine of a Trinity. There are those in which it is expressly and plainly declared that the Father alone is the one God: for example, 'this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John xvii. 3);

there is 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all' (Ephesians iv. 5, 6). Then there is another class of passages, in which God and Jesus are spoken of together in a manner that according to any ordinary use of words, absolutely forbids us to think of them as coequal members of a Trinity. 'Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God' (Mark x. 18, and parallel passages, Matthew xix. 17, Luke xviii. 19). 'I have not spoken of myself, but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak' (John xii. 49). The number of such passages might be multiplied indefinitely and the cumulative force of their testimony to the belief of Jesus himself and of the New Testament writers cannot be evaded.

There is, further, one fact of the greatest significance. The most confident Trinitarian will allow that the Jews do not, and never did, believe in the Trinity. Now Jesus was a Jew; he lived among them,

preached to them, and won some of them as his followers. If he had believed in the Trinity, would he not have announced his belief? If he was 'very God of very God,' and the second person in the Trinity, he must have known it; and if he knew it, he could not have used the language which has been already quoted without laying himself open to the charge of misleading those who listened to his teaching. That a teacher, who had so much to say about the heavenly Father, should not only keep silence about what (according to the Trinitarian argument) it was most important for men to know, but should deliberately suggest false ideas to their minds—this is a notion which no disciple of Jesus will for a moment entertain. He laid down his life for truth, and in love of God and man; his silence, therefore, about the Trinity is conclusive as to his own belief with regard to it. What was the main burden of his teaching? In what respects did he seek to reform the religion of his countrymen? Why did they reject him and eventually compass his death on

the cross? Did he say a single word to call in question the great characteristic doctrine of the Jewish people—the unity and unipersonality of God? Had he done so how eagerly would his enemies have pounced upon it! No; what he did attack in Judaism was its outwardness, its exaggeration of the importance of mere ceremonialism, its habit of thinking that the service of God consisted in the keeping of Sabbaths and fasts and feasts, its making clean the outside of the cup and the platter, while within there was nothing but extortion and excess. The kingdom which he desired to establish was spiritual, not worldly; it came not with observation. Thus do we read the story of the events which led up to the crucifixion as narrated in the Gospels. They give us not even a hint of the substitution by Jesus of a Triune doctrine of God in place of the one that was long familiar.

It may, perhaps, be said in reply that the doctrine of the Trinity could not be developed so long as Jesus remained on the earth, and that this is the reason why,

knowing it, he yet did not communicate it to others. But surely this view only raises, as we have seen, fresh difficulties of the gravest character. That a revealer of saving knowledge should withhold the central truth (as the Trinity is now said to be) of his religion, and deliberately allow those to whom his mission was directed to remain in ignorance of it, is a supposition fatal to all reverence for the ingenuousness of the revealer. Moreover, how does the case stand with the apostles after Jesus had taken his leave of them? They also were Jews, and, with the exception of Paul, they addressed themselves principally to those who had been brought up in Judaism. If then, the apostles had exchanged the pure monotheism of their hereditary faith for a belief in the Triune God of 'orthodox' Christianity, the alteration would have been far too important to be passed by in silence. Especially should we expect a clear utterance from Paul, when on Mars' hill he expressly declared unto the men of Athens 'the unknown God' whom

they ignorantly worshipped. And yet in that address (Acts xvii.), not only is there no hint of the Trinity, but almost in set terms, the very idea of it is excluded. We are told of 'God that made the world and all things therein,' whom men 'should seek,' 'if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us'; in whom 'we live, and move, and have our being,' whose 'offspring' we are. We are also told of 'that man whom he hath ordained,' words which clearly assert the humanity of Jesus and imply his subjection to God the Father. Is it conceivable that Paul could thus have referred to two of the persons in a co-ordinate Trinity and have remained entirely silent about the third? Even in that early time there were controversies which have left their mark on the Epistles and the Book of Acts, especially with regard to the terms on which the Gentiles should be admitted to the communities of disciples. Of the discussions which arose later on the Trinity no anticipation whatever is furnished in the New Testament.

We are thus brought to the close of the Apostolic age without meeting with any trace of this doctrine. It cannot be denied, indeed, that in the views that were held about the person of Jesus a 'development' was taking place, which is reflected in the Synoptic Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, and the Fourth Gospel. Between the Jesus, whose friends 'went out to lay hold on him; for they said, he is beside himself' (Mark iii. 21), and the pre-existent Word presented in the Proem of the Gospel that bears the name of John, there is no doubt a wide interval. Yet it is to be observed that the exaltation of Jesus Christ in the later writings of the New Testament, though it took him out of the rank of ordinary humanity, did not lift him into that of Deity.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

It was not until Christianity spread from its native home in Palestine, and came into contact with systems of philosophy in foreign lands that its original pure monotheism was modified by the doctrine of a

threefold personality in the Godhead. The growth of this doctrine is indicated with great clearness in the three creeds of the Church of England. The oldest, though not in its present form, is the so-called 'Apostles' Creed,' which in its doctrine of God is purely unipersonal. 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,' etc. Jesus is called the Son of God, but nothing is said about God the Son. Next comes the Nicene Creed, which was adopted almost in its present form at the first Œcumenical council at Nicæa, in A.D. 325. This creed, as distinguished from the former, attributes a derived deity to the Son. 'I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible: and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made, who for us men, and

for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man,' etc. The Holy Ghost is called 'The Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.'[1] He is therefore associated but not co-ordinated with Deity. For this last stage we must still wait a long time—how long is not certain—but at last we meet with the fully developed doctrine of the Trinity in the creed, falsely called Athanasian, which was certainly unknown for some centuries after the death of its reputed author. In it we hear of 'One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity,' described with imposing redundancy of expression, as though the author expected to carry conviction by means of persistent repetition.

A doctrine may, of course, be true though it is not found in the Bible. But the position of those who contend for the doctrine of the Trinity, is that it is a truth

[1] The original Nicene Creed was enlarged at the Council of Constantinople held A.D. 381.

of revelation, and that that revelation is conveyed through and contained within the Bible. To them, therefore, a complete answer is given by showing that the real source of the doctrine is not biblical, but ecclesiastical. The accounts which history has handed down to us of the councils in which these high questions of the Divine Economy were discussed are hardly calculated to inspire confidence in the wisdom or the fairness of their proceedings. 'In an age when the ecclesiastics had scandalously degenerated from the model of apostolic purity, the most worthless and corrupt were always the most eager to frequent, and disturb the episcopal assemblies. The conflict and fermentation of so many opposite interests and tempers inflamed the passions of the bishops: and their ruling passions were the love of gold and the love of dispute. Many of the same prelates who now applauded the orthodox piety of Theodosius had repeatedly changed, with prudent flexibility, their creeds and opinions; and in the various revolutions of the Church and State, the

religion of their sovereign was the rule of their obsequious faith.'[1] It is hardly through councils thus constituted and conducted that one would expect to receive a binding interpretation of the true doctrine of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth.

CONCLUSIONS

We are brought, then, to the following conclusions. It is agreed on all hands that the doctrine of the Unity of God is both in accordance with the human reason, and is clearly and emphatically taught in the Bible. It is agreed on all hands that the doctrine of Trinity in Unity, if not

[1] Gregory Nazianzen, ap. Gibbon. Gregory was a famous Bishop, a pillar of Orthodoxy, and President of the Council of Constantinople, during part of the sittings. 'I am so constituted,' he writes, 'that to speak the truth, I dread every assembly of bishops; for I have never yet seen a good result from any one of them—never have been at a synod which did more for the suppression than it did for the increase of evils. An indescribable thirst for contention and for rule prevails in them.'

absolutely contradictory to reason, is, at least, beyond its comprehension; therefore, if we are to believe it simply on external authority, we have a right to expect that the authority should be unexceptionable in character, and that the doctrine should be stated in unmistakable terms. And yet what are the facts? There is not a single passage in the Bible where it is distinctly stated that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three Persons in one God, and it is admitted that the doctrine, if taught at all, is taught by implication merely, and was explicated at a much later date by ecclesiastics who had many interests to serve other than that of truth. Could, however, a truth of 'revelation' be left to such precarious chance? Further, we have found that, alike in the Old and New Testaments, there are great numbers of passages which, according to the ordinary use of language, absolutely exclude the current orthodox doctrine. Lastly, we have traced the growth of the doctrine through stages that are clearly marked in the Apostles', the

Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, in each of which it is more fully developed than in the one preceding. Stranger history could not well be imagined for a doctrine which we are called upon to believe as essential to the faith which bears the name of Christ.

RESULTS OF TRINITARIANISM

The history of the controversies that have taken place about the Trinity illustrates in a most instructive way the dangers to which the doctrine exposes that belief in one God, which is dear alike to Jew, Christian, and Mohammedan. Herein lies the great importance of the Unitarian position. I have carefully avoided speaking of Trinitarians as Tritheists, since they repudiate the term. But at the same time, the belief of the great majority is practically Tritheistic. It could hardly be otherwise. From the time that the doctrine was first formulated, even practised thinkers and writers, who set themselves to expound it, continually laid themselves open to the charge of heresy, on one side or another.

Jerome writes, 'What did he believe? Certainly, *either* hearing three names, he believed that there were three Gods, and so became an idolater; *or* believing that the three words were three names of one God, he fell into Sabellianism; *or*, taught by the Arians, he believed that there was only one true God, the Father, and that the Son and the Holy Ghost were created beings. What else he could have believed, I know not.' And yet the Arians were branded as heretics, as much as the Sabellians, so that, according to this Father in the Church, the choice lay between two forms of heresy and idolatry. But, in fact, there were with respect to the doctrine many other heresies, whose names have come down to us. If such difficulties beset professional theologians, what wonder that the great mass of plain-thinking people, unable to appreciate subtle shades of abstract thought, should regard the three persons in the Godhead as three distinct Gods? Small blame to them for doing so.

It is impossible to estimate how much

Christianity has suffered through loss of the simple yet grand faith in one God, the Father, which Jesus held and taught. When that is once abandoned, there does not seem to be any special reason for limiting the number of 'persons' to three. The Protestant stops there, but the Roman Catholic includes also among those to whom divine honours are to be paid 'the mother of God.' Paolo Sarpi, the eminent historian of the Tridentine Council, has pointed out how the pictures of the Madonna and Child were introduced in the fifth century, not in honour of Mary, but to remind the faithful, in opposition to the errors of Nestorius, that even as a babe, Christ, being divine, was worthy of worship. But saddest of all the results arising from the doctrine of the Trinity is the radically false conception which it has given of Christianity as a religion for mankind. It has removed the chief emphasis from those moral and spiritual conditions on which Jesus in the Beatitudes and indeed throughout his teaching, insisted, to the acceptance of a mystery

which baffles the understanding; it has substituted metaphysics for faith; it has made men hate one another instead of becoming helpers of each other's joy.

When we consider how small is the sum of our knowledge, that even the wisest men are not agreed as to the ultimate essence of that Matter, which we are constantly handling, it seems something like profanity to speak of God as though we knew all about him, and could either confound the persons or divide the substance, if persons or substance there be. Who knows the modes of his existence or can define the Infinite, or has the right to dictate to others as to the precise nature of him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain? Away with all such vain presumption! While bowing in reverence before the mystery of the divine nature, we cannot blindly accept the propositions that other men lay down. It is necessary to distinguish between God in himself and that which the creeds say about him. How far removed are all these metaphysical doctrines from what is really important

and what men yearn to know! The simplest utterances deserve most confidence. Tell me not that you have sounded the infinite deeps of eternal Being, or know what took place in the councils of Deity ere the universe took form; for if you do I am certain you speak without knowledge. But let one go to men struggling with sin wellnigh unto despair, and assure them, not by means of logical proof, but with the convincing persuasiveness which heart-belief carries with it, that there is a God of righteousness and mercy; let him go to the sorrowing and the careworn with the message of a Father's love; let him warn the tempted that sin cannot be hidden but carries eternal consequences with it; let him make the lonely and sad-hearted feel that they are 'not alone, for the Father is with them'; let him point the dying and the bereaved to that spiritual home with God where sorrow and parting shall be no more, and he will then have no need 'to wrest the Scriptures' to fit a foregone conclusion, or to exercise his ingenuity in drawing inferences from

isolated texts, or to fall back on the authority of church councils. Whatever hides from men the true sources of strength and comfort, or serves to obscure the thought of God as he reveals himself in the mind and conscience and soul is a hindrance to religion. And because the doctrine of the Trinity does this—makes God unreal, by representing him as an inconceivable Being with one nature, but three persons, and substitutes for the Jesus of history an equally inconceivable being with one person and two natures; because, moreover, the related and dependent doctrines are equally unfounded and misleading—I feel bound to protest against the innovation, and rest in the ancient faith in God, the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, his Son.

Note referred to on page 118

It is convenient to note that the word Unitarian, as opposed to Trinitarian, is in practice used for two totally distinct purposes. It denotes (1) those who hold a particular doctrine about God; (2)

those who stand for freedom of religious thought and for an open church, unfettered by dogmatic restrictions. These two classes *might* be quite distinct from each other, but as a rule, they happen to be identical. I am not concerned to defend the latter use of the word, which indeed hardly admits of defence, on purely logical grounds. In the strict etymological sense of the word, *Unitarian* no more connotes freedom than *Trinitarian* connotes doctrinal finality. Yet, on the other hand, it is to be remembered that in the nomenclature of parties the logic of events does not always follow the logic of abstract definition. *For the time being*, at any rate, it will not be denied that, speaking generally, the persons and the only persons who believe in and organize themselves for religious thought unlimited by any external authority, and for church fellowship without doctrinal trammels, are those who in theology believe in the Unity of God, and deny the Trinity in Unity. It was not always so; it may not always so remain. Unitarians may possibly (though I do not

think this likely) come to care more for their doctrine than for the principle of free inquiry which led them to it; or, on the other hand, those who now acknowledge dogmatic authority in any of its various forms may abandon it, and yet continue to hold their present doctrines on a different tenure. If, and when, either of these events takes place, a more consistent method of naming will have to be adopted.

As a rule, the Churches that now call themselves, or are called by others, Unitarian, hold the buildings in which they worship upon open trusts. The older ones were founded towards the close of the seventeenth century by the English Presbyterians, who, although 'orthodox' in theology, refused to fetter the freedom of their successors, and generously devoted the chapels which they built to no narrower purpose than 'the worship of Almighty God.' It is in the exercise of the freedom thus secured that the congregations have passed from Trinitarianism to Arianism, and from Arianism to Unitarianism. No

theological tests are applied to either minister or people. Of course, there must be a certain amount of sympathy among those who habitually associate together for religious worship and work; but this 'certain amount' is undefined, and is regulated by the free play of natural causes, which include spiritual affinities, harmony of ethical tone and ideal, as well as theological agreement. The principle of free and open trusts, although liable to possible abuse, has been amply justified by its results. The Churches, now commonly known as Unitarian, have, like others, passed through theological changes, but with singularly little friction, thanks to their elasticity of constitution. Very few are the cases in which doctrinal differences have disturbed the harmony between minister and congregation.

THE FUTURE LIFE[1]

THE question, 'What shall be after death?' is only less searching than the question, 'Is there a present God?' It is possible to go through life without thinking of God, or caring about him. It is hardly conceivable that anyone should go through life without once being faced with the thought, 'Some day, I shall die—and what then?' That is a question which does indeed strike home; and all the more, if one has sought to avoid it. Many have faced that question, and found no answer. Some have come to the conviction, that there is no Future Life; many have tried to justify by argument a hope that is stronger than argument, that a Future Life does await the soul on the

[1] From 'Unitarian Affirmations,' by R. T Herford, B.A.

other side of death. Of these various answers I will speak presently. I only observe here that in no age, and in no country, so far as evidence is available, have men been free from the haunting presence of this question of a Future Life: and in their search for light upon the darkness of the solemn mystery of death, is found one element in the pathos and the tragedy of human history on this earth.

It is evident that for each person now living, the question of a Future Life must take the form of a hope rather than a present certainty. The time when the question will be finally answered to us, will be when we cease to live on earth. But the question does not concern ourselves alone. We live now—but many whom we have known and loved have died; and the more we have loved them, the more we are concerned to know if they now have entered upon a heavenly life, and are where, some time, they and we may meet again. It is perhaps here that the question of a Future Life becomes most urgent, and doubt concerning it most disquieting. I

can understand a man rejecting the belief in a Future Life for himself, and meeting death with neither the expectation nor even the wish for anything afterwards. Many have done so, professing themselves contented, and even happy, in the thought that death is the final extinction of all that concerns them. But to see some one else die—friend, or wife, or child—and to feel assured that they are gone, and not merely gone from sight, but blotted out of all existence, so that no future meeting is possible—that is an experience which must strain the philosophy of the most rigid Stoic who ever did violence to his natural affections. In this, as in other things, 'no man liveth to himself alone'; and a fate which he might cheerfully accept for himself, looks harder, to say the least of it, when imagined in the case of some one else. And he would be a bold man, not to say a rather heartless one, who should try to comfort some mother, grieving for her dead baby, with the assurance that though she will never see her child again her sorrow will be ended in

death. She will return to dust, and know nothing, feel nothing, be nothing. That is surely a dreary consolation. And, though I am quite aware that this belief in a Future Life must rest on something stronger than merely the protest of the sorrowing heart in the hour of its loss, yet that protest serves to show how strong is the natural craving for that which alone the Future Life can bestow. And that also goes to explain why it is, that the belief in a Future Life has been supported by arguments sometimes extremely weak—never entirely conclusive. It is not possible to prove with logical precision, that there is a life after death; any more than it is possible to prove with logical precision, that there is a present God. But it is possible to arrive at an assured certainty of the existence of God, founded on a real knowledge of him, that no proof or want of proof can disturb. And on the basis of that steadfast belief in God, may be founded the belief in a Future Life, with more assurance of certainty, than can be reached by any other line of thought. If

God is the Father in Heaven, then we have the strongest possible reason for believing that there is a Life after Death for his children. Such, at all events, is the ground of my own belief in the Future Life. And to explain, and, so far as I can, to justify that position, is the first part of my task. Afterwards, I shall briefly notice other arguments that have been used to support the belief; and shall then inquire what light, if any, is thrown upon the nature of the Future Life by the argument from the love of God—more particularly, what may be looked for in regard to the fate of sinners, and the condition of the righteous.

I have, then, to build up the argument from the Love of God. That is, to me, the strongest argument, for this amongst other reasons, hat it rests upon something that we can know for ourselves; upon realities and experiences of our own religious nature, quite apart from all external evidence. We ought not to have to learn that which most deeply concerns us, from sources of knowledge outside ourselves. And, if it be said that, as a

matter of fact, we do learn most of what we know, in religion and everything else, from sources outside ourself—teachers, books, etc.—still we only know the truth and reality of what we learn, when we verify it in our own nature and our own experience. If, then, from the Love of God which we know, or can know, in our own souls, we can infer a life after death for his children, we stand on firmer ground than if we rested our belief upon the statements of the Bible or the dogmas of the Church.

To believe in God as the Heavenly Father, is to believe that each human soul is the object of his love. It is to believe, not merely that he is the Creator, who has called into existence human beings, and all other creatures, and who rules them under the sway of a general Providence, but that each human soul stands to him in the relation of child to father—the relation of dependence, where the bond of union is Love.

This was what Jesus taught; and in the Fatherhood of God is summed up the

revelation which he made. That is to say, the central truth of the religion of Jesus is that human souls, each as well as all, are the direct objects of the Love of God. They depend on him for their origin and continued existence they share in his spiritual nature; and direct personal intercourse between them is always possible, whether or not it be always, or often, consciously attained. If God is the Father, he must be present, in some sort of living contact, with every soul. That soul may not be aware of him; but he must know that soul through and through. And, if God be the Father, he always was and always will be the Father.

We believe in God as the Father—thereby expressing, as well as mere words can express, our thought of God as he is known and worshipped, in the personal religion of each soul.

The declaration that God is Love, is the statement in general terms of the truth that God is the Father. The latter is the language of personal religion; the former is its equivalent in the language of the

philosophy of religion. This may, perhaps, serve to explain why Jesus never said that God is Love. The phrase only occurs in the first Epistle of John, and is nowhere ascribed to Jesus. It is the expansion, into a general truth, of what Jesus declared concerning the special relation of God to the human soul. And it means that in him whereby we know him as our Father, that whereby we feel his authority as the Moral Ruler, that whereby we acknowledge his Providence, and own him as the Creator and Lord of all worlds—all this is summed up in the one word Love. And this marks the furthest point to which man's knowledge of God has attained. All and everything which God has so far revealed to man,—his power, knowledge, wisdom, justice, mercy, pity, long-suffering and whatever else goes to make up the meaning of what we hold to be divine—all that is included and expressed in the supreme axiom of religious thought—'God is Love.'

In what I have to say, therefore, I shall take the phrase, 'God is Love,' as equiva-

lent to 'God is the Father in Heaven.' And I begin by suggesting that, whatever light there may be upon the two great mysteries of human life, viz., its origin and its destiny, is to be found in the thought of the Love of God.

Why was the human race ever created at all? Why, in the far-off past, was the first beginning made, of that life of humanity which has risen to its highest glory in Jesus, and has taken great and noble forms in so many others? May not the answer be, so far as human minds can frame it—that the Love of God called into existence those who should be the objects of his love; those to whom it should go forth, those who, being akin to their Maker, should not only be his creatures, but should be able to share his love, and, in some humble measure, return it?

That is merely a ray of light into the very depths of life. It does not illumine and make clear all the mystery. Far from it. Perhaps it only shows how much more there is of mystery than we had thought. But it is a ray of light all the same; and

by its help we begin to have some insight into what may have been the original intention and purpose of God in creating this universe, and calling into existence the human race upon this earth. It is the act of the Love of God in providing the objects of his love. There may have been other ways in which he could have done so; and in other regions of his creation, his love may show itself in other forms. Of these we know nothing. As regards this world, he has chosen to make it the dwelling-place of a race of beings, spiritually akin to himself. And the whole story of the life of man upon the earth, is the story of how God has watched over mankind, and led them onward and upward, in a path of moral, religious, and intellectual growth. The whole trend of human history—however slow, and marked by interruptions and apparent defeats—is in the direction of an increasing likeness between the Father in Heaven and the children on earth. It shows a long process of training, of discipline, whereby man is gradually taught to become what God would have

him to be—slowly moulded into the perfectness which is to be the final result. Doubtless, if he had so willed it, God could have created straight away a race of perfect beings, in whom he might have found the objects which his love desired. We can only say, that he did not so choose. And we see and know his love in the patient, watchful care which he has shown towards his children during all the long centuries. How it can be, that he should find any satisfaction in the existence of children so blind, so self-willed, so imperfect, is for him to say; not for us. But he appears to do; for his love goes forth to all—however little they know it, and however poorly they return it. Assuredly it is not because they have deserved his love. Even the best and holiest who have ever lived, would shrink from saying that they deserved to be so loved. If they love him with all their heart and soul and strength and mind, it is because his love first sought them out, and called forth their love in return.

The creation and preservation of the human race, then, may be explained as

the free act of the Love of God. And this Divine love is not shown only to the race as a whole. It might seem, that God was —so to speak—waiting for the finished result of the long discipline which he applies to mankind. It might seem as if all that has yet been achieved of human life were but unfinished attempts, sketches, preliminary studies, of no value in his sight, except as leading up to the perfect end. If that were so, no one could accuse the justice of God, or say that he was harsh. But, if we know anything of the Divine love, we know that it is shown towards each soul separately, and not merely towards all collectively. That is the witness of all who have known most of the Divine love. Why God should love each single soul, even those most out of accord with him, is his own secret, which no man knows. But that he does is the humble confession, the profound conviction, of all souls that know him.

If, then, the Love of God throws light upon the creation of man, and upon the long story of his life upon earth, and if it

does this, not merely for all human life in general, but for each individual soul in particular, then has it not something to say upon the future destiny as well as upon the origin of man, for the individual as well as for the race? If God, in his wisdom and his love, has called mankind into being, and led them upward and onward through the ages, 'sure he still will lead them on.' And, if he visits with his love every single soul of all his family upon earth, then may we not believe that the mere death of the body will in no way interrupt, or put an end to, the love which he shows towards the soul? Is there not hope of immortality in the present fact of the Love of God? Humanly speaking (and only so can we speak), would it not be strange that God should love a human soul through the three score and ten years of the bodily life, and then allow, not merely the body, but the soul as well, to be utterly blotted out and extinguished? If he were merely Creator, and nothing more, he might look with unconcern upon the vast array of unfinished attempts that he

had made, and might without compunction cast aside as spoilt rubbish the poor human lives that had so little worth. But he is more than Creator. He is the Heavenly Father. And he loves the souls whom he has called into being. Why, we know not; but he does. Then, how must it be for him, if death—the mere bodily death—should put an end, for ever and ever, to that union of love in which he has bound a human soul to himself? If our friends die, and leave us, we have hope that we shall meet again, in a better world, and the only comfort for the aching heart is the Love of God which enfolds us all. But for him, there could be no such comfort, if he knew that the death of the body was the end also of the soul. If death snapped, for all eternity, the bond of love in which, for a few short years, he had united a human soul to himself, then there would be for him nothing but the always repeated pain of parting, and parting for ever. If he loves human souls, so that they are his children, and if there be no life after death, then what a mountain of grief must have

been piled up for him, as he has watched through the centuries, and beheld the generations rise and pass away, all the souls whom he has loved, gone from him into nothing—done, finished, blotted out, and every single one a child of his, whom he has watched over, and loved as only he can love. If this were so, then indeed he would be the suffering God that some have imagined him to be, with a hopeless ache of suffering far more than all the sins and sorrows of this present world could inflict upon him.

And all this by his own act, too! For (again humanly speaking), there was no compulsion that forced him to create. If he did so as a free act of divine love, then may we not feel sure that, as a free act of divine love, he will continue the existence of the souls he loves, after the death of the bodily frame in which for a season they have dwelt? It is the soul, the spirit, which is made in the image and likeness of God, and which is akin to him; able to know his love, and to meet it with an answering love. And the death of the

body is a mere incident in a life which God has, by his love, made to be immortal. Thus, from the belief that God is Love, there follows the conclusion that there is a life after death for each human soul.

I leave the reader to judge for himself whether this is a strong foundation on which to rest one's belief in a future life. To me it is stronger than all others, because it goes down to the deepest reality known in human experience, namely, the love of God. This argument can stand by itself if need be ; and would suffice, though there were nothing else to confirm the belief in a future life. Moreover, it is not open to the objections which weaken the force of some arguments that are used to support the belief. To rest one's hope of immortality upon the Resurrection of Christ is to entangle it in the very serious critical difficulties which beset the accounts of that event contained in the Gospels. If you do not feel the difficulties, and think that you can accept all that is stated in the New Testament about the resurrection of Christ as literal fact, well and good. None

the less, the difficulties are there; and if they were not, the conclusion still remains far from obvious, that because Christ rose from the dead so shall we. That he did rise from the dead, that after the death on the cross his spirit returned to God and now lives with him, I certainly believe; but only on the same ground as that on which I believe in the future life of all human souls—past, present, and to come. The real witness of Jesus to the hope of immortal life is to be found in the firm trust in the love of God which he himself felt, and not in the confused and conflicting accounts by unknown men, concerning what they supposed to have happened after his death. As an argument for the reality of the future life, the record of the alleged resurrection of Christ seems to me to be without any value or weight at all.

Far more important—and, if not a proof of the reality of a future life, at least strongly confirming the hope of it—is the argument based on the obvious incompleteness of the earthly life. As regards the body, there is a clearly marked series of

changes—from birth to maturity, from maturity to decay, ending in death. But in regard to the mind there is no such completion. The intellectual powers are often to be seen in their fullest activity up to the day of death, although the physical instruments of thought and memory may be weakened. The moral progress of the mind still less shows any sign of coming to an end with the bodily death. And the conclusion can hardly be resisted that the earthly life, as we see it lived, is only a small portion, only the mere beginning of a life that will be prolonged indefinitely after death. It is not what one would naturally expect, that intellectual powers trained to splendid achievement, or moral character purified and made strong in the saint and the hero, should both be suddenly cut off short by a mere physical event that happens to the body.

And, further, what of the lives that we say are cut off before their prime? What of those who have never had any fair chance, intellectually or morally? What of all the seeming injustice of human life as

we see it, if the life on earth be all, and not rather a part of a vaster life whose span is not bounded by the grave but stretches away into eternity?

Considerations such as these do not amount to a proof of a future life; but they certainly do confirm our hope of such a life; and they are moreover in closest harmony with that argument from the love of God which we have already considered. Taken together, they all form a very strong foundation for a belief in the reality of a future life; as I believe, the strongest there is, for a trust that goes deeper down than any proof. And being wholly established upon facts of the spiritual nature, the argument need take no notice of objections based upon the physical structure of man. As regards the possibility and the reality of the future life of the soul, the physical facts of death are entirely neutral. If belief in a future life include a belief in the resurrection of the body, then the case is different, and the difficulties formidable. But the resurrection of the body is a doctrine with which I

am in no way concerned, and which I do not hold in the very slightest degree.

Having now, to the best of my power, set forth what seem to me the strongest grounds for the belief in a Future Life of the soul, after the death of the body, I proceed to inquire what conclusions, if any, we may reasonably form as to the nature of that future life. And here let me remind you that of what actually shall be hereafter, no one knows. I believe with all the energy of my mind, that there will be for each one of us a life after death, as I believe that the souls of those who have died in past times are living now. But it is not within human knowledge to say positively what happens to the spirits of the departed, or what they do. And in what I have to say upon the nature of the life hereafter I attempt nothing further than this: To ask if the same consideration of the love of God which leads to the belief in a future life may not guide us to some at least helpful view of what that future life may have in store for us?

One conclusion is quite obvious, and it

is this: That, if there be a future life at all there is a future life for every soul without exception. I accept that conclusion. I do not hold to the view that immortality is conditional upon character and conduct in this life. And my reason for not holding that view is, that I believe in immortality as the result of God's love, not as the reward deserved and earned by the virtue shown in the life on earth. My argument is, that God called human souls into existence to be the objects of his love, and that he maintains them in existence for the same reason and to the same end. Therefore, there is ground for believing that he will prolong the existence of the soul after the death of the body, since otherwise his own purpose would be defeated. Conditional immortality implies that human sin can make God forbear to do that which he intended, or tire out the patience and exhaust the love which began the discipline of the earthly life. It is not a question of man's deserving immortality at all. No one deserves it. It is a question of God's fulfilling his own purpose. And it is in-

conceivable that God should allow the act of his own creature to frustrate and put an end to the final attainment of his will. If it be said that some are so wicked that no amendment seems possible, I reply that we are not entitled to judge of degrees of wickedness. The greatest sinner who ever lived is nevertheless in his origin one of God's children, however much he may have defied and rebelled against his Father. And it is, to say the least, a strange conception of the Fatherhood of God to say that he will allow that 'stubborn and rebellious son' to work his own destruction, to say that infinite love has no way of bringing that hard heart to repentance. I therefore hold the consistent belief, with all its consequences so far as I see them, that for each human soul there is a life after death; and that God will fulfil his purpose towards each human soul by training it through such discipline as he may see fit, to the condition of final perfection.

When we speak of a life after death, we are apt to think of it as equivalent to

Heaven, a state of blessedness and joy and peace. That is certainly one of the possibilities of a future life, but not the only one. If it were, then there would be a manifest injustice in supposing that those who live evil lives on earth should, after death, enter straightway upon an immortality of bliss. But, on the lines of the doctrine which I am explaining, the future life is, in itself, merely continued existence, and may be far otherwise than joyful. And it is here where differences of character and conduct during the earthly life find their result. By the way in which we live on earth, we make our own Heaven or Hell in the life to come. It is difficult to believe that Heaven and Hell are two distinct places or regions, and that the good go to one and the bad to the other. There is no such dividing line between the good and the bad as would be needed on this theory. And if only the good, in this case necessarily the perfectly good, go to Heaven, the number to be found there will be but small.

But it is different if we think of Heaven

and Hell as what we make for ourselves in the life hereafter, by what we are and what we do in this life. It is said that when we leave this world we can carry nothing with us. At least, we carry with us character and memory. And are there no possibilities of terror in the thought of a future life in which the sinner shall see himself as he really is, and be confronted with the remembrance of all the evil that ever he has done? When he shall see the good that he turned away from, and the miserable things that he chose in preference? When he shall see what he might have been, and what he has become? When he shall see the consequences of his evil deeds spreading evil in other lives, and be powerless to stop them? Is there no terror in such a prospect? And if it be the Love of God which continues his existence, may there not be to the hardened and impenitent soul, so long as it remained hardened and impenitent, a veritable agony of suffering in the mere presence of that solemn and awful Love? That is one of the possibilities of the future life;

and many a one, thinking thereon, would be glad to believe that there was no future life at all. 'God is not mocked; and what a man sows, that shall he also reap.' This, too, is part of the love of God. Truly, it is only fools who make a mock of sin.

Such a condition I believe to be the inevitable result of sin—at all events of unrepented sin—in the future life; and that there could be a worse Hell than such a state I am unable to imagine. But the thought of the love of God (which is the clue to the whole conception of the future life) leads us to understand that the suffering of the guilty soul is not vengeance inflicted by God, but the necessary consequence of its own acts; and not only so, but the suffering marks the first stage of the discipline by which the love of God will purify and restore that guilty soul. If the crooked is to be made straight, the process will not be without pain. If the soul, disfigured and warped by selfishness, which is the root of all sin, is to be fashioned again into that image and likeness of God in which it was made, surely it must needs

suffer. And because God is Love, and all souls, even the guiltiest, are still his children, he will not leave one of them for ever alone with his sin, but will, out of sheer mercy, administer the needful discipline of remorse, repentance, and forgiveness, whereby that soul is saved. All this follows from the belief in immortality by the love of God; and though that belief has no place for eternal torment, still less for a mere Hell of physical torture, yet none who fully realize what it means will say that it is a comfortable doctrine that lets the sinner off too easily. And it has this in its favour, that it asserts the final and complete fulfilment of the purpose of God towards each human soul, without resorting to the futile and feeble conclusion that the Almighty and all-loving God lets himself be defeated by human sin, and ends the vain endeavour to recall the sinner by pronouncing upon him the sentence of final damnation. You may tell me of wickedness for which you say no repentance is possible; you may say that by sin the conscience is seared and the very soul

destroyed, and that for such there can be no other fate than total extinction. I answer—that you are not God, and you do not know. But, if he is indeed Almighty Love, then of a surety even the hardest and guiltiest soul will not for ever hold out against him, but will at last give way and turn again to the Father.

The belief in immortality as a consequence of the Love of God, leads thus to an expectation of moral discipline, by which the soul is to be purified and restored. The form and the measure of such discipline will depend on the character and conduct of the soul that has to submit to it. And those who have spent their days on earth, doing their best to love God and their neighbour in singleness of heart, will not need to fear what the future life may have in store for them by way of discipline. Because they know the Love of God here, and they will know it no less hereafter. For them, the future life will be Heaven—the state of more perfect service, more perfect knowledge, and more perfect union with God—the attain-

ment in fuller measure of all that, in loving God, they have in the earthly life most longingly desired. Whatever the unselfish heart can look for as its fulness of joy, that it may hope to realize in the future life. None of us dare call ourselves good; and how much of Heaven we shall find in the future life, we may not venture to forecast. But this, at least, is certain—that as God is our Father here, so he will be our Father there; and whatever he may see fit to do with us, to purify us from the stains of our earthly life, we shall be in our Father's hands, whose purpose towards us is only Love. We can, therefore, trust him; and when our time comes to go hence, can say: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

If you have at all followed the thought that I have been working out, of the future life as an existence of the soul apart from the body, and depending on the love of God, then you will not expect any attempt on my part to say what the souls of the departed do in the future life; what heaven is like, or where it is. Of these

things I have nothing to say. I know nothing. Many have tried to suggest, in glowing language, and in terms borrowed from the earthly life, what may be the arrangements of the next world, and the occupations of those who dwell in it. All such attempts must utterly and completely fail; and I venture to say there is not a single one of all the visions of Heaven that have been described—from the Book of Revelation downwards—that one could, with one's whole heart, believe to represent the real truth. I know, at all events, that I have never met with any attempted description of Heaven which did not seem unreal and impossible. Of all that, we shall know when our time comes; and we can only say, at present, that God will appoint for us what we shall do, and it will be better than we could, in our present ignorance, imagine or desire for ourselves.

Nevertheless, although we refrain from the attempt to represent the joys of a Future Life in figures borrowed from the earthly life, and have, therefore, nothing to say about white robes, and golden

harps, and thrones and crowns, and the like, there still remains something to be said as to the nature and the possibilities of the life hereafter.

The same thought which has guided us all along, namely, that immortality is by the Love of God, and is necessary for the fulfilment of his purposes towards the soul, will lead us to the conclusion that in the future life there will be progress, moral and intellectual advance, increase of knowledge, and gradual advance towards moral perfection. Heaven, if it is to be Heaven at all, cannot be a mere stagnation, a dull monotony of bliss, vainly imagined to be perfect joy. If the souls of the departed are to *live*, they must live in the full and free exercise of their noblest powers, enlightened reason, purified conscience, and exalted love. And here comes in the consideration, founded on the incompleteness of the life on earth, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. If that incompleteness is a reason for believing that life is continued after death, it is equally a reason for believing that the

life after death implies intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress.

Stated in other words, this means that there is no finality in death. It means, that there will be chances in the life hereafter for those who had few or no chances here. It means, that though a man die a hardened and impenitent sinner, there will still be a possibility of repentance—rather, I would say, a terrible certainty of discipline, of moral suffering needful to restore him. It means, that the opportunities denied here will be given there; and that the lives cut off in their prime, or in youth, or infancy, find there the completion of their full span. We cannot know why such lives are thus, as we say, untimely ended. Few bereavements are harder to bear. But, at least, the belief in immortality by the Love of God helps us to rest in the assurance, that there is no real frustration of the purpose of their lives. God calls them hence, when he sees fit; and surely they serve him there, as they did or would have served him here. In the existence of the soul, the fact of

the death of the body may be hardly more than a passing incident—a sleep and an awakening, but by no means the all-important and dominating fact which we commonly think it to be.

But death, though it be no occasion for fear (since we are in the hands of God, wherever we are), is nevertheless the termination of the earthly life; and it implies, of necessity, the parting of those who have loved one another here. I think that is the aspect of death which chiefly we dread. We could calmly meet death ourselves; but the thought of bidding farewell to those dearest to us, and of knowing that on earth, at all events, we shall never see them more—that is a thought which no loving heart can bear unmoved. What, then, of meeting hereafter?

I believe, with an intense conviction, that we shall all meet in the Future Life. If immortality be, as I have throughout maintained, the act of the Love of God, necessary for the fulfilment of his purpose towards the soul, and if, as a consequence,

all souls without exception live on after death, then surely it would be against all reason to say that those who have known and loved each other here, shall not meet again hereafter. If, indeed, you hold to conditional immortality, and say that only some, few or many, will live after death, then I know not what ground you may have for believing that you will meet in the next life those you have loved in this. They might live in heaven, and you might be destroyed. But if all departed souls live on, then, though they pass through such stages of moral discipline as are appointed for them, still all are there ; and surely the Love of God, which has allowed them to be near and dear to each other on earth, will not keep them apart in heaven. I do not presume to guess how such meetings are effected, or how the old friendships and unions of affection are resumed, after the separation caused by death. Will the child that died in infancy, be still the child, when the mother whose loving heart has treasured the image of it for years, at last meets it in the next

world? God only knows. Those who have loved each other here, will surely meet again; death does not quench their love, and heaven will heal the grief of their parting. There are those who love without being loved, and carry through life an aching heart, for which earth has no cure. And in other ways, the relations in which we stand to each other in this world are difficult, if not impossible, to think of as existing in the life hereafter. When I think of these things, I always rest in the conclusion, that all will be ordered for us by the Love of God our Father, of whose love alone it is that we shall live, or do live, at all. We are in his hands, here and hereafter; and neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from his love.

The sum of all that has been said is this, that God is Love, and therefore he has called into existence human souls to be the objects of his love; therefore, he will continue his unchanging purpose towards them after the change involved in the death of the body. His purpose is seen

in the gradual training of the soul into spiritual likeness to himself—the attainment by all his children, every single one, of a perfection like to his own. And though for awhile, through the changes and chances of this mortal life, the faults and sins, the error and ignorance, to which human nature is liable, his children serve him in this world imperfectly or not at all, yet his love must finally prevail, and bring back at last every wandering child, every lost prodigal, to the Father's house. That is the Love of God shown to those whom he has called to be his children. Not for any merit of theirs, for towards him they can have no merit; but of his own free grace of Love, he orders our lives so that, after death, we live on in some closer union with him, and through eternity, in the fellowship of all holy souls, serve him with ever more perfect service, and in his presence find utter 'fulness of joy.'

NOTE

THE discourse here printed on 'The Future Life' is one of a series of six lectures by the Rev. R. Travers Herford, published under the title of 'Unitarian Affirmations.' The other lectures deal with GOD, JESUS, the BIBLE, the CHURCH, FAITH and FREEDOM. In his preface to the second edition of the volume, the author says that the Lectures represent his settled convictions and he only wished that they could mean for others as much as they mean for himself.

FOOTPRINTS OF THE CREATOR[1]

THERE are two methods of procedure in tracing the processes of creation, one scientific, the other haphazard. We may begin by assuming that creation came about in a certain way, and draw our inferences from our own supposition; or we may take facts as we see them about us, and proceeding from what is known step by step into the unknown, prepare the way for our final conclusions on a solid basis. When Columbus was nearing the shores of America, he showed his mutinous sailors pieces of carved wood, and branches of trees with green leaves on them, floating on the waves, as proof that land was not far distant. Neither the most sceptical among them, nor the best Catholic among them, doubted for a moment that these things were proof not

[1] By J. E. Manning, M.A.

only of land where trees were growing, but also of the abode of men—for carved sticks do not float on the waves without having first been in the possession of the men who carved them. That was a step from the known to the unknown. The carved wood was visible before them. The land was as yet invisible. But Columbus knew it was there, and that it was inhabited. No other conclusion could be drawn from the evidence before him. Again, there is now in the British Museum a black basaltic stone, three and a half feet high, two and a half feet wide, discovered in 1799 by M. Boussard, a French officer of Engineers, while making excavations at Fort St. Julien at Rosetta. It is called the Rosetta Stone. On this stone were three different kinds of writing, one of which was Greek and easily deciphered, and this said that the stone had been put up, 195 B.C., by the priests of Egypt in honour of Ptolemy Epiphanes, for having remitted some arrears in their taxes. It further said that it was decreed to write the same inscription in the hieroglyphic, or sacred

language of old Egypt, and also in the demotic, or common language of the country at the same date. Here was a wonderful discovery. The hieroglyphics had hitherto been an insoluble riddle. But here was the key to the enigma. By comparing the Greek, which was known, with the characters of the hieroglyphics, which were unknown, the meaning of the hidden signs was discovered; and this being applied to the obelisks and walls of the rock-tombs covered with the hitherto mysterious signs, the meaning of them all was soon made out, and the history of Egypt was divulged.

So must it be with us if we would discover the past history of our earth, and of the creatures that people it. The facts about us are the evidence, and science gives us the key, and furnishes us with the method of interpretation. We may, if we choose, take the first chapter of Genesis, and say there is nothing more to discover; the key has already been found. We might say of a house, that the roof was put on before the walls were built, or the

foundations dug. But we are not likely to satisfy the world by such an assertion. So we may say with Genesis that light shone on this earth before the sun and moon were created ; but it is not the best way of finding out the method God pursued in creation. The only way to build a house is to begin with the foundation, and so to walls and roof. The law of gravity will not permit of any other method. The laws of nature work in certain fixed and definite directions ; they cannot, they will not, act in any other way ; and they never contradict each other. So that we may lay down this as a preliminary law to start with :—that God proceeded with the work of creation by natural laws, *and that any theory of creation inconsistent with those laws is, by that very fact, untrue.* The story of creation can be unravelled only if we are willing to proceed from what we know to what we do not know, but can infer, confining ourselves strictly all the time within the limits of natural law. This method is as *religious* as it is scientific. The Apostle Paul never uttered a truer

word than when he said, 'The invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity.' No scientific man would dispute that statement. Invisible things are seen through visible things. Kirchhoff saw the metals in the sun by means of his spectroscope though they were blazing ninety millions of miles away. Adams saw the planet Neptune on paper, discovered by his calculations, long before it was actually seen through the telescope. They both saw these invisible things, because from the evidence of visible things *they must be there.*

Let us ask, then, what are some of the visible things by which the invisible things of creation are known. The investigation is like tracing footprints back along the sands of an illimitable shore. They are the footprints of the Creator. And first let us begin with *Man* himself.

(*a*) Man is now a civilized being, living in society, under good government and secure laws, with steam-engine, electric

telegraph, penny post; with weapons more awfully destructive than were ever known before, and with medical skill and sanitary knowledge for the preservation of life, greater than has belonged to any other period of the world's history. But man did not always live in handsome houses, or cross the sea in ocean liners, or use the printing press; and women did not of yore keep in repair the garments of the household with the sewing machine. In the time of the patriarch Abraham—let us take a step that far back; it seems a long time, but it is really nothing in the history of the life of man on the earth—man was nomadic, dwelling in movable tents, going about with his flocks and herds and servants from place to place, wherever there was a good water supply and plenty of grass to be had. Others, not choosing this wandering life, settled down and tilled the ground, learning by degrees to use a plough with an iron point instead of the old fire-hardened share of wood, with which they once scratched the ground and sowed their corn. But we know that

even this was an advanced stage of civilization compared with what once prevailed. Look at the traces of man previous to this, and you find him living in lake dwellings, to be freer from the attacks of wild beasts; or in log huts, shaped by iron—and earlier, by stone—hatchets; living chiefly on the produce of the chase. But even then he sowed wheat for bread, and wove garments of flax; and burnt clay with fire to make various rude utensils of the potter's art, wherein to cook his food. Earlier still we find him living in caves, companion of the mammoth and the cave-bear, with tools of chipped flints; an artist even then, as the remains of carved bones clearly indicate; and the earliest traces of him are in the river drifts, when he was a shaggy, wild, long-haired savage, gnawing roots, or crouching behind rock or tree to pounce upon his prey, uncertain each morning whether night would not set in before he could get enough to eat, and whether before the next morning dawned he might not himself furnish a repast for the wolves. And earlier still? Archæ-

ology does not say; but the naturalist steps forward and says, before that at a period which can probably only be reckoned by millions of years, he was a creature learning to walk erect, ungifted as yet with articulate speech, unable to provide for the morrow—an arboreal creature, most probably, living for the most part on fruit, a very humble creature indeed, and bearing traces in his bodily frame of a lower origin still; yet a creature in whom was the latent possibility of all that he has subsequently become, a far-off Milton, Shakespeare, Channing.

All this indicates a steady growth, development from humbler forms to higher, from feebleness to power, from dawning intelligence to towering intellect, from inarticulate speech to eloquence; from the animal pure and simple up to man. The footprints of the Creator in the sands of time with regard to man are all on the onward march; indicating a steady progress from low to high, from small to great, from good to better, thence to best.

Let us, then, lay down this law, ob-

served in the development of man, that the visible things point out this truth in the invisible wisdom of God, that he has watched over him in love and kindness, as a mother over her helpless offspring, guiding his feeble steps on the onward way, and leading him ever to higher aims and nobler achievements.

(*b*) Look now at the story of the *Earth.* If you go into almost any museum you will find fossil bones of extinct creatures taken from the red earth of the caves round our coast or inland, dug up from under thick layers of stalagmite, that have taken ages of dropping water charged with lime to form. But what are these ages compared with the immensity of time previous to them, when other creatures had for millions of years been *extinct* when they were living? A few years ago, when scrambling down a face of rock on the Cardigan coast, I saw some yards below me what appeared to be a large and well-formed slug on a point of rock, which on approach turned out to be an ammonite in excellent state of preservation, that had by the washing of

the waves of ages got exposed. But that fossil shell takes us back at least over two great divisions of geological time, each of enormous extent, to a period when the sea was peopled with living things small and great, and the air resounded with the hum of insect life, though few birds as yet are found, while in their stead bird-like 'dragons of the prime' beat the air with their noisy wings. Further still along the shores of time we come to an age when the tree-ferns, the horse-tail plants, and club-mosses flourished along the river banks and lake-margins, to be buried deep after long years of accumulation under mud and sand, and changed by pressure into our coal measures. 'Sandstones for building; marbles for decoration; metals for machines; coals wherewith to drive them; purest oil from muddy shale; jet for the lapidary's art; loveliest colours, exquisite perfumes, and curative drugs from gas-tar, even sugar therefrom, three hundred times sweeter than that from the cane—these are the rich gifts from the deep rocks, which, struck by a more magic

rod than Moses wielded, have given up their treasures for man's needs and delight.'[1] But here also is life, high up in the scale of existence, and footprints of creatures then living are to be distinctly traced in the rocks now brought to view. From that time we may go further and further still into the twilight of the ages, and trace the forms of living things lower and lower down in the scale of creation until we come to the oldest stratified rocks we know, and even then we may find the evidences of what once was life. For in the Laurentian rocks, 'vast and venerable sediments of primeval seas,' once believed to be totally without life, remains of a supposed living creature are to be found, called for want of a better name 'the dawn creature' (Eozoön), the thing representing the dawn of life; yet so low down in the scale that many scientific men are even now in doubt whether it was, indeed, a living creature or not.

This is the record of the rocks. Here, too, as we trace the footprints of the

[1] The Story of Creation, by Edward Clodd.

Creator, the progress has been from lower to higher, from the less organized to the more highly organized, from the simple to the complex. It is as if (which is indeed the simple fact) some great, all-seeing, all-knowing mind had directed the onward progress of living things from small to great in endless succession. These fossils, what are they but bits of life, as it were, hardened down and preserved, so that ages, incalculable ages, of the past are restored to us, and we see that far-off past again before our eyes? Pompeii is a fossil town. It was buried seventy-nine years after Christ; it has been covered up for more than eighteen hundred years; and is now disclosed to us as it was then; the skeletons, even the hair and teeth of men, women, and dogs preserved; their very forms reproduced by pouring plaster into the cavities where their bodies lay; the bread in the baker's oven; the dried-up wine still red in the cup; the names of the houses; all the life of the city, its luxuriousness, its wickedness—these things are preserved, and we see in the fossil

Pompeii what the place and people were of yore.

So fossil animals preserve to us the life of past ages, compared with which the time that has elapsed since Pompeii was a living city is as nothing. Geologists tell us that 'almost in the very middle of the rocks which comprise the crust of the Earth, fossil remains of cuttle-fish occur—and their very ink-bags are found with the colouring matter so well preserved that it has been made into paint.' These things in the middle of the rocks! But they were deposited on the floor of the sea, what millions of ages ago who can tell?

(*c*) But do the footprints of the Creator cease with the traces of *life*? Are they lost with the last marks in the rocks of the oldest stratification? There are other kinds of rock in which no trace of life is found, igneous rocks, the solid granites of our mountains. What of these? They have a history more wonderful still, and lead us still further back as we trace the footprints of the Creator. They tell us of a time when our earth was in a molten

state, cooling down like the planets Jupiter and Saturn now; and if we ask their history, they lead us to the glowing mass of the sun out of which they were flung, and sent spinning along their orbits into space. Tracing still further back we come to a time when the earth, and all the planets, and the sun itself, floated in space in a state of thin luminous vapour, like the nebulae we can now see in the midnight sky. Yes! and as we trace the footprints of the Creator, it becomes clear that every star we now see in the vault of heaven was produced in the same way; produced in accordance with the same laws of nature that cause rain to fall and the dewdrop to form upon the morning grass. Rain and dew are formed by condensation from the invisible water-vapour in the atmosphere. Even on the driest day the air around us is charged with moisture. In the evening when the sun has gone down you can see it forming over the surface of the cooling ground; and in the morning it begins to disperse once more as the sun's rays shed their genial warmth

through the vapour-laden atmosphere. But the mists of evening, the clouds of morning, the dew, the rain, are all formed by the condensation of the particles of moisture, invisible until the cold affects them, when they gather together in more or less defined form, hanging as mist on the surface of the land or sea, as cloud in the upper air; or falling as dew on the grass by night, or as rain, if the atmosphere is overcharged; and in cold weather they appear as frost, sleet, or snow.

Just so, astronomers tell us, the worlds that make up the universe have been condensed from the world-vapour which fills the whole of space—a rainfall whose drops are stars and worlds. We know that the sun is composed of the same materials which compose our earth; and so of all the bodies which circle round it. But, if the spectroscope tells us truly, the farthest stars visible by the telescope are made of the same materials also; and the same is true of the vaporous nebulae that float like fleecy cloud-masses in the midnight sky. The sun is the parent

mass of our system, and its offspring, the planets, are of like substance with it. They have also like motions. It is a mass of incandescent matter, self-luminous and the source of light to us. Some of the planets are in a semi-molten state, while our earth, being small, and hence parting more rapidly with its heat, has become (on its surface at least) a cold solid mass. Our moon, the satellite and offspring of the earth, is a dead world, as our earth also one day will become. The life-history of all the planets, and of the sun itself, is the same—from incandescent vapour to a fiery mass, a molten world, a hardening world, a dead world. As Lockyer says, the time will doubtless come when the sun, with all the planets welded into its mass, will roll a cold black ball through infinite space. That, however, will be infinite ages hence. What was the condition of things infinite ages in the past? There was a time, as Genesis says, when the universe was 'without form and void'—space filled with the materials out of which the universe was to be made, thin

luminous matter, so thin as to be almost impalpable, stretching to the utmost confines of infinity, as vapour hangs in the atmosphere on a warm day. Then the particles of this diffused matter gathered together particle to particle into world-mist and world-rain. But the world-mists are what astronomers call nebulae, some of which appear to be in a state of violent motion, forming spirals or whirlpools, tinged with a greenish white light. And the dew or the rain of this world-vapour are the fixed stars, as they are called, glowing suns of incandescent matter, gathered together by the action of forces identical with those that distilled the raindrop, and set in motion by the drawing together of their particles towards a common centre; and as the motion grows more rapid, world-drops, like our earth, and the planets, Jupiter and Saturn, are flung off, like a drop of water from a grindstone. 'Yet,' and here I quote the author of *The More Wonderful Genesis*, 'the loosened stars do not fall, as the prophet saw them, like leaves or figs. Or rather—a still

greater wonder—they are for ever falling, yet finding their safety in the fall—falling around each other in orbits of eternal order. The moon falling round the earth by the same law as the loosened leaf or fig, and moving over a mile every second. The sun and stars falling round other centres, and some moving twenty miles a second. The earth, too, falling round the sun, and swiftly rolling as it falls. Yet all moving so truly that they are still "signs for seasons, and for days, and for years," and for moments, too; so that by these golden pointers on the dial of the sky the astronomer corrects his clock to the fraction of a second. How much more wonderful than lights fastened to a firmament are these living worlds, fastened by their very falling, and all held and propelled so truly by God's hand of gravity!'

This 'nebular hypothesis,' as it is called, is not imagination. It was started many years ago by Kant and Laplace when much that our scientific men know to-day had not yet been discovered. But it has

found acceptance from its inherent probability. Though incapable of actual demonstration, it explains so much, it is supported by such a vast body of evidence accumulating from the investigations of science in all directions, that few in the present day dispute it. 'And how much grander and more religious a thought of creation it gives! For, to the deep thinker, this *attraction* that rounds the world is only the hidden hand of God. A medieval painting shows the Creator, on that fourth day, in the form and dress of a man, sticking sun and moon, like shining wafers, on a solid sky. How much more reverent is science's picture of a Creator, unseen, indeed, yet working always and everywhere, from within arm's reach to the furthest sight of the telescope, still rounding the spheres, from mist-globules that refresh life to mighty globes that support it, and hanging suns and systems through the infinite firmament on these unseen threads of law! It is an infinite and eternal Genesis. The old Bible begins with a beautiful text: "In the beginning God

created the heavens and the earth." But the Bible of modern science and faith opens with a far finer one: "Without beginning and without end, from everlasting to everlasting, God creates the heavens and the earths." '[1]

Thus tracing the footprints of the Creator from the present to the past, from the visible to the invisible, science brings us to a time when the universe, as we know it now, began. Other universes are being created to-day in like manner, and we can see the process of their creation going on. A time will come when this universe will, in all probability, be dissolved into its primeval vapour, like a mist that obscures the morning, and then the work of God will go on anew, and in time another created universe will stand bright and serene in the depths of space. Meantime, it is the laws of God that conduct these processes from beginning to final consummation. Science brings us thus face to face with the Creator. Step by step

[1] 'The More Wonderful Genesis,' by H. M. Simmons.

it leads us gently by the hand, disclosing ever fresh wonders in the evidences of creative thought. It shows us how 'the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity.'

How much this story of Creation as told by science differs from that contained in Genesis, I need not stop to point out. That story is in itself an old-world legend, very beautiful and interesting as illustrating the thought of man in far-off times, and showing how he no more than we can get beyond the thought that 'in the beginning *God* created the heavens and the earth.' *It* is legend; science is fact, and poetry too. *It* proceeds by miracle; science by law. The laws of science do not, and cannot, dispense with the Creator. Nature's laws are nothing but the observed method by which the Creator proceeds to work. In themselves they have no more power to create than the law, Thou shalt not steal, has power to punish the thief. Without a Lawgiver, a Law Sanctioner,

a Law Enforcer, they are null and void. Every law of science, by its mere statement, presupposes a power that established it. That power is God—the Creator, Sustainer, and Father of all things.

Science, then, has a story of Creation, beautiful, sublime ; no poetry so splendid ; no romance more thrilling. All the marvels of nature go to make up the incidents in that story ; the life and death of worlds fill up its moving drama. Of the whole history of the universe thus evolved the words of Darwin respecting the story of life as told by Evolution are as true as they are impressive, 'There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one ; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved.'

DOCTRINE OF THE UNITY OF GOD IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES[1]

FROM the earliest apprehension of God as actual to the final conclusion that 'God is All' the ascent of the mind is immense. The passage from worship as fear to worship in love marks the development from polytheism to monotheism. The Semite rises out of polytheism to the conception that God is One. The Aryan rises out of a terrestrial polytheism to a polytheism no less evident though celestial. To the Semite one God is an intellectual certainty and a moral inspiration. To the Aryan many gods are a necessity and a hindrance to ethical unity. The Jew, the finest product of the Semitic stock, raises his hands in prayer and utters his creed: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.'

[1] From an Essay by Thomas R. Slicer, M.A.

The supreme flower of the Jewish religious genius was Jesus of Nazareth. He was a Jew after the pattern of those sturdy defenders of spirituality in religion, Amos, Micah, Joel, and Isaiah; declaring in a time of spiritual decay that God is Spirit; surveying the formalism of his age and declaring that 'the pure in heart shall see God'; renewing the ancient hope of God's Kingdom and its Messiah, but declaring, 'It cometh not with outward show but is within you'; a Jew suspected of making innovations upon the ancient faith, but answering in the words he had repeated in the synagogue worship of his native village, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment.' The second is this, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' He made the sayings of the Jewish fathers the groundwork of his teaching. The Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer may be found

substantially in the aspirations of the prophets and psalmists of Israel. Jesus, like the other great prophets of his race, arraigned the narrowness of religious dogma, and tested it by the breadth of religious need. He contradicted only to enlarge. That which does not seem Jewish in the words of Jesus was the Jew fulfilled, enlarged, and sublimated.

CHRISTIANITY, JEWISH AND UNITARIAN

Christianity was Jewish in origin and essence. That it ceased to be Jewish in expression was the accident of history, not the purpose of its founders. Jesus, Paul, and Simon Peter, when they were most emphatic for the universality of religion, spoke as Jews. The words ascribed to the Master phrased the conviction of the disciples, 'Salvation is of the Jews.' When the struggle came between the religion of Jesus, the Son of Man, and the religion of the temple of the Sons of Israel, Paul declared, 'After the manner which they call heresy, worship I the God of my Fathers.' The test of orthodoxy

is thus to be found in spiritual communion. This is the key-note of Christianity—that it finds its ground of being in God. It is Unitarian in its origin since it is Jewish and therefore monotheistic: a divine impulse from the life of Jesus, which finds its source in God's unity, its expansion in man's brotherhood, its inspiration in man's relation to God the Father, and its mission in revealing the Father to his children who 'ignorantly worship' him. The conversion of the world to Christ was an effort to reduce the confusion of the Aryan Pantheon with its 'gods many and lords many' to the unity of worship in the religion of Jesus, the Semite. The Scriptures of the new faith were Jewish, every line; its teachers were at first Hebrew; its philosophy of life was the conception of a Galilean Hebrew. Essential Christianity is essentially Jewish; therefore essential Christianity is Unitarian.

The absorbing zeal of a true Hebrew gave birth to the Unitarian idea; the universalism of Paul set it free; the hope of the coming Messiah held it together;

the Unity of God and the Brotherhood of Man afforded it motive for worship and communion. Subsequent processes confused its simplicity, and substituted at length, in the fourth century, a metaphysical speculation for the religion of Jesus, and thus introduced the great Apostasy.

The first break away from Jewish origins which appears (in the Book of Acts), is the appointment of the seven deacons 'to serve tables.' All the names are Hellenic. We must take account of the classes first affected by the new movement. There were the Jews by birth and religion, who were Palestinian as to residence and Aramaic in language; or Alexandrian as to residence and Greek in language. There were those who were Greeks by birth and Jews in religion—'proselytes of righteousness.' In the third place there were Greeks by birth and religion—converts from paganism to the new faith. Here is the material for the controversy which appears, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistle to the Gala-

tians, as a conflict between the believers in Paul's gospel and the Jerusalem party—those who insisted upon the universality of religion and those who admitted that it might become universal but must be Jewish first. The struggle was maintained until the destruction of the centre of worship at Jerusalem made all authority turn upon ideas, unsupported by appeal to holy places and their associations. But the narrower contention survived in the Judaic sects, 'who still sought to particularize and contract Christianity, as Gnosticism enlarged it to vagueness.' Several well-defined claims were now put forth, all Jewish in origin. Of the most important, the Messiahship of Jesus, Baur well says, 'Had not the Messianic Idea—in which Jewish national hopes had their profoundest expression—fixed itself on the person of Jesus and caused him to be regarded as the Messiah who had come for the redemption of his people, and in whom the promise of the fathers was fulfilled, the belief in him could never have had a power of such far-reaching influence in

history. It was in the Messianic idea that the spiritual contents of Christianity were clothed with the concrete form in which it could enter on the path of historical development.'

HOPE OF THE SECOND ADVENT

If it be asked how could such a hope, local and national to the Jew, be transferred to Greek minds, we are reminded of several well-established facts. (1) The great body of Romans and Greeks converted to Judaism in the century preceding our era had given Judaism a singular and significant place in the Roman Empire. It was a religion allowed and set apart, literally assigned the place it claimed; whatever enthusiasm stirred its heart would make its pulsation felt throughout the Roman world. In the first century of our era Alexandria, Rome, and other great metropolitan centres were as Jewish as New York is to-day. (2) Ethically disquieted, the Roman world looked with hope for a deliverance answering to human

need; and here was a people with a genius which was in its inception Jewish, but has been found in its expansion simply human. (3) To any who might inquire what had become of the 'Messianic hope' the answer was that it had been pushed forward to the 'second advent.' The chief inspiration of Jew, Hellene, and Roman convert thus became an ardent hope for the reappearing of Christ in the clouds of heaven to introduce a millennial reign.

SUBJECTION TO THE FATHER

In view of this second advent, the *Parousia*, martyrdom became a virtue, marriage an inconvenience and personal possessions a hindrance. But however the Messianic idea may change, there has been no change in the monotheism of the religion of Jesus. The Jew had never declared that the Messiah would be God; the Messiah was never to be an object of worship, or in any sense supernatural. Those who looked for the second advent, in ascribing a nature not simply human to

Christ, in no way exalted him to the place of God; the subordination of the Son to the Father still survived, crucial and invariable, beneath all efforts to phrase his nature and define his being. No father of the church for three hundred years lost sight of the distinction between absolute Deity and its representation in the terms of human life; *always the Son is subject to the Father.* The Synod of Antioch rejects and condemns the term ὁμοούσιος (consubstantial) as used by Paul of Samosata to indicate the identity of substance between the Father and the Son; and though, in the next century, the council of Nicæa returned to it as the test of orthodoxy, it left its testimony to the subordination of Christ to God in the Nicene Creed in the terms, 'Very God *out of* very God.'

In the 'Shepherd of Hermas' we find such statements as this: 'First of all, believe that there is one God, who created and formed all things out of nothing. He comprehends all and is alone not to be comprehended (limited by definition), who cannot be defined in words, nor conceived

by the mind.' This is a favourite passage with Irenæus, as we might expect, with Origen in the third century, and in the fourth century with Athanasius, to whom has been ascribed a doctrine of a Trinity of which he never dreamed.

This, then, is clear through all intricacies of doctrine, that the Absolute Being of God remains untouched by the growing claims of Christ. The cause of it is to be found in the unmistakable Jewish enthusiasm for the Eternal which penetrates even the expressions pointing to subordination of the Son.

To Clement of Rome: 'Christ is sent forth from God and the Apostles are from Christ; both came of the Will of God in the appointed order.' So in 'the Teaching of the Twelve,' God is 'the Almighty Maker,' and Jesus 'his servant.' Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians seeks to prove the resurrection not by referring Deity to Christ but by the analogy of the Phœnix, as Herodotus and Pliny tell the tale of its return from death.

In the Gospels and the Epistles, the

strong monotheistic tone of all the utterances is to be noted; even in the Apocryphal documents, and especially in the Fathers of the second century, there is the same insistence upon the Absolute Being of God. How this was penetrated by the suggestions which later developed into a vague tritheism will be noticed later.

In 'the Teaching of the Twelve,' a second century document, and even in the catechetical instruction in the Alexandrian churches, there is the clearest proof that the magnifying of Jesus Christ has in no way obscured the Supreme object of worship. I quote from the instructions of the Alexandrian Catechumens: 'I believe in one true God, the Father Almighty, and in his only Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit who giveth life.' At the close of the third century, this doctrine of 'subordination' holds its place, though much overlaid by later thought: 'I pledge myself to Christ and I am baptized in the faith of the one Supreme Uncreated God, in Jesus Christ, by whom the universe was created and

formed, and from whom all things proceed. I believe in the Lord Jesus, his only Son, the first-born of all creation, begotten before the ages by the good pleasure of the Father, not created, by whom all things in heaven and earth were made, visible and invisible. In the last times he descended from heaven and took upon him our flesh. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He lived holily and blamelessly in the world, walking in all the commandments of his God and Father.'

To this age belong the last of the Apostolic Fathers and the Confessors. It is the century of Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Irenæus. The doxology of Flavian of Antioch had not yet been heard in any church. Men did not yet 'shout forth Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.' This, according to Philostorgius, was new to the Church, which before that time had used the form 'Glory be to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Though some also said, "Glory be to the Father in the Son and in the Holy Spirit."' The Church

was still dependent upon 'the heart, which believeth unto righteousness,' rather than upon nice distinctions of the speculative intellect.

PREPARATION FOR DOGMA

But already in the Christian 'gnosis' of the second century a process was at work preparing a soil for the tangled crop of dogma which covered the third century with its rank growth. The Gnostics, whom the Church repudiated, infected the Church itself with their methods, though in the school of Philo, and in the Rabbinical science of numbers, a strong tendency had prepared for the change. We find the Old Testament searched for the allusion to the growing Christology of the Church. Wherever 'Wisdom' is spoken of, it is said to be the Logos-doctrine of the New Era appearing in the ancient writings. Every reference to 'wood,' prefigures the cross, the 'stone' is Christ himself; the pastoral Psalms are full of the Good Shepherd, and the sorrows of Messiah are located in

Gethsemane and on Calvary. The Eternal Reason, which the Hebrew makes to dwell always where the Eternal One is, teaches the pre-existence of Christ. To our age many of these constructions are not only false in exegesis and far-fetched in meaning, they are also known to be false readings of the Septuagint Scripture by Greeks ignorant of Hebrew.

The essential and Absolute Being of God became more and more difficult of apprehension. *An instrument of creation* was demanded by the popular imagination. Already in Egypt the material for this idea was ready to hand; the Greek Cosmogony supplied its share; and the Demiurge of the Gnostics and the Logos of the Orthodox contended for the mastery; often there was but little to choose between the one and the other theory, as it was worked out by its partisans. This creative agent is not one and the same at all times; sometimes it is the Son, sometimes Wisdom, sometimes the Holy Spirit. So late as the time of Gregory Nazianzen, A.D. 390, we find diversity of view concerning the

Holy Spirit. He says: 'Some of our theologians regard the Spirit as a mode of the Divine operation; others as a creation of God; others as God himself; others again say they know not which of these opinions to accept, from their reverence for Holy Scripture, which says nothing about it.'

APOSTOLIC AND MARTYR AGES

These later speculations, however, did not belong to the Apostolic Fathers. The Apostolic Age set itself just two problems and no more: it was intent (1) upon purifying society; and (2) as a means to this end, on proclaiming the Supreme God as the object of worship—revealed in his servant Jesus so clearly as to make him seem the Son of God, 'only begotten.' Vice and polytheism found their antagonists in a faith which proclaimed, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord, the Eternal, the Eternal is One,' and then summoned to that purity of heart which was to be the preparation to see God. This, and no more, was the essential message of Jesus Christ to the

age called apostolic, as they understood it; the adjustment of human relations upon the terms of a Love which in God is Fatherhood, and in man is brotherhood. It was not an age of dogma. They were to 'do God's will' as a means of knowing any teaching to be authoritative. There was the freest and most inexact recital of the incidents of the life of their Master. They were not yet so far separated from their Jewish beginnings as to excite recognition as a new religious cult. The Christian guild, as a Jewish organization, was tolerated long after Greek and Roman guilds had been prohibited.

When we pass to the Martyr Age we find that we have not even yet reached the age of dogma. It was simply believed that the sanction of high courage and consistent purpose takes precedence of the 'form of sound words.' The martyrs did not die to vindicate a body of doctrine; they were sacrificed sometimes at the instigation of personal hatred and private spite, sometimes through suspicion of their secret assemblies, which in the case of the

Roman and Greek guilds had been forbidden by law. Sometimes the enthusiasm for death made them rush upon martyrdom, goading to violence a government unwilling to sacrifice its subjects. Sometimes the necessity of providing actors in the gladiatorial shows and cruel sports of the amphitheatre made a levy upon the 'suspects' a convenient resource. Sometimes the government attributed to these proscribed ones the pestilence of famine for which a superstitious age could not account by natural causes. Some are surprised that the best emperors were the keenest persecutors; but the Roman idea of the State made it inseparable from religion; disloyalty was atheism, and the feeling as to any independent organization within the State is reflected in the saying of Marcus Aurelius: 'What is not useful to the swarm is not useful to the bee!'

From whatever motive, when Carthage, Smyrna, Antioch, Rome, or the Churches of Gaul furnished 'confessors' to death, none of them died who were willing to curse Christ or sacrifice to the image of the

emperor. Such a sacrifice was never interpreted as disbelief in the ultimate Deity to whom Christian and Roman alike referred religion. There was no examination in the terms of theology which a later age vainly sought to identify with Christian faith. The martyrs of the second century would have died as readily upon the demand to believe in a Trinity as they would upon the demand to believe in the Pantheon of Roman divinities. The emperor was to them a man to be argued with, as the Apologies of Justin, Tatian, and Origen show; worship of him was forbidden by their belief in the Eternal One and their adoration of the purity of his Son, Jesus Christ. This age of the martyrs speaks in the words of Ignatius of Antioch, A.D. 115, who beseeches his friends at Rome not to interfere with petitions for his release.

BEGINNINGS OF CONTROVERSY

The passage from the Fathers of the Faith to the Fathers of Theology is made by Justin Martyr (A.D. 163), naturally,

for he was a student of philosophy and a Greek, though born in Samaria. Henceforward religion will express itself in the terms of philosophy, borrowed from Greek, Roman, and Oriental sources. Even its martyrs will make their confession in philosophical terms; and emperors will eventually cast in their lot with one party or the other in the debate of the schools. The strenuous faith of early Christianity will soon be overcome by the strident declamation of controversy.

The very protests of the so-called heretics are as instructive as the trend of authority against which the protests were made. Marcion (130–180) leads a revolt from philosophy in favour of a religion of the New Testament. He is so persuaded of the benignity of the Father as Jesus taught of him, that he cannot identify him with the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Jehovah may be a God for the Jews, but he is not the Father of Jesus. The Jew's God was, perhaps, a just God, but the God of Jesus was love. The passage to dualism is easy.

The essential heresy of Marcion, Basilides, Valentinus, and all the Gnostics lay in their denial of the Unity of God. They were not arrayed against the claims of the Trinity, for such a doctrine had not been even remotely foreshadowed in their days. The eternity of matter, the creation of the world by inferior powers, and the two-God theory horrified Irenæus, as later they did Origen and Tertullian ; the letter of Irenæus to his old fellow-pupil Florinus, who had embraced the teachings of Valentinus, is an effort to reclaim him to a belief in the Unity of God. The opponents of Gnosticism felt a greater solicitude because they foresaw that despite the noble lives of its first exponents, there would logically attend upon Gnosticism the same degradation which had debased both Stoicism and Epicureanism. It is therefore an error to suppose that the enthusiasm of Irenæus, Origen, Hippolytus, and Tertullian was because they were lacking in regard for God's Unity. It was

the very reverse of this which gave power to their assault upon Gnosticism.

Still another class of heretical opposition is represented in that vindication of the liberty of prophesying which takes the name of Montanism. Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla, the founders of a Society of Friends during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, were perhaps incited to a philosophy of salvation, a study of the life of the soul, by the example of the stoic emperor, or goaded to it by the growing licentiousness of a court over which a philosopher reigned, but which a profligate woman and her son Commodus actually ruled. Legalism was strangely united to liberty in the teaching and practice of Montanism. Fasting and asceticism commended the heresy to the fiery soul of Tertullian. He declaimed against its frenzied prophesying until he was himself in an ecstasy of passion from which he passed to adhesion to the sect (A.D. 202), which fulminated from Carthage its anathemas against the licence of Rome. The heretic was more orthodox than the Church

in behaviour, and with a strange mingling of doctrinal exactness and personal self-denial, held aloof from the communion of Christianity as breeding a schism, only to form a sect still narrower, which living through the third century as 'Tertullianists' made prophecy ridiculous and asceticism contemptible.

TERTULLIAN'S TEACHING

The Church in the West under Tertullian's lead was governed by a spirit entirely foreign to the liberality of Jesus and Paul in life and teaching. It did not maintain in any just degree the feeling of Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, that God had spoken by other lips than those of Jews. 'There is one River of Truth, but many streams fall into it on this side and that,' said Clement. His generous attitude was like that of Irenæus, whose mission from the churches of Gaul to Victor of Rome pleaded for moderation towards Montanism, since it held strongly the doctrine of the word, of the Holy Spirit, and the liberty of the soul to know the will

of God. Clement declared that 'the cure for error is more knowledge.' Such was not the attitude of Tertullian and Tatian; these masters of abuse were most orthodox in declaring all philosophy 'a doctrine of devils.' Their motto was 'Only believe,' a motto enforced by a picturesque blasphemy against human error, which left nothing to be supplied by a later age in its trials for heresy.

Tertullian, indeed, speculated upon the original righteousness of man, fulfilled in the ideal humanity of Christ; but his fine phrase, 'Man first, then God,' was so twisted by his bias against his opponents that he never rises to an 'enthusiasm of humanity.' Even to Tertullian the subordination of Christ leaves God supreme: 'Christ is God's ray, as the rays shine forth from the sun in the heaven; as I call the ray sun but not the sun ray; so I call the son God, but not God the Son.'

'THE FIRST UNITARIANS'

The student of the second and third centuries, following the lead of most

modern writers, will come upon a group of names classed in a loose way as 'the first Unitarians.' We have already claimed as the first Unitarians the Jews to whom Jesus, himself a Jew, spoke of the Fatherhood of God; the first Unitarian records are the Scriptures of the Old Testament, to the reading of which the chief Church Fathers and champions of Christian doctrine declare their conversion from Paganism was due. Such is the testimony of Justin Martyr, Origen, and Athenagoras.

By 'the first Unitarians,' however, most Trinitarian writers mean quite another matter. They have forgotten the Jewish origins of Christianity; and that from the Jew Philo and his compatriots in Alexandria neo-Judaism, neo-Platonism, and Christianity have all drawn their stock theories for the Logos-doctrine, without which it is doubtful if the Christian Church would have lapsed into the Trinitarian belief.

With serene oblivion of such facts certain names are pilloried as Unitarians and condemned. They are the group who, without

perfect logic, but with a certain instinct for the facts of early Christianity, sought to revive the old doctrine of the Unity of God, unconfused by the newer doctrine of the Logos in its manifold varieties of statement. They are defenders of the primitive faith, not seceders from the orthodox teaching. Who are these men? Many of them are known to us only by name. Some who early saw the inconsistency between the history of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and that given in the synoptics, the contradiction between the introduction to John's Gospel and the birth stories of the synoptics Matthew and Luke, were stigmatized as Alogians, 'Deniers of the Word.' Others made a feeble attempt at New Testament criticism and held that we have a record of little more than a single year of the ministry of Jesus; still others, with quite excusable rationalism, said of the Apocalypse, 'Of what use is it all?' In this group must be placed Theodotus of Rome and that other Theodotus who came to Rome from Bysance; also their disciples.

PAUL OF SAMOSATA

But attention is chiefly riveted by the brilliant career and acute intellectual gymnastic of Zenobia's officer, Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, 260–270. For the most part he, and all others whom the councils of the fourth century condemned, are known to us like Celsus, only from the statements of those who have left us the condemnation of their heresies. They all knew 'the gentle art of making enemies'; and the enemies wrote their histories. Paul of Samosata may well stand for all the rest. His views are thus summed up by Pressensé, a Trinitarian writer: 'The Bishop of Antioch carried out the principles of Theodotus and Artemon (monarchianism) to their extreme consequences. He lowered the dignity of Christ so far as to liken him to a mere man. Denying his pre-existence, he admitted no distinction of persons in the Godhead. The Logos was for him simply the consciousness which God has of himself, not a separate

person but the simple consciousness of his own personality. In this sense man is the image of God, but he can never attain to essence with the Divine Being, not even by Jesus Christ. There was a positive action of the Word upon the man Jesus. The Spirit of God had descended upon him, but this action was merely an influence, and did not imply unity of essence. Jesus was indeed born of a virgin, but he was none the less in his nature a man like other men, with this difference, that he realized holiness and thus merited the grace of God in extraordinary measure. The divine Logos animated him by inspiration, but was not incarnate in him. "Wisdom," said Paul of Samosata, "did not enter into substantial union with human nature." Thus the difference between Jesus Christ and other men is relative only. Wisdom simply dwelt in him in an exceptional manner, and it was by the measure of this Divine communication alone that he was raised above ourselves. How, indeed, can it be maintained that Jesus is the Son of God? Is not that name already given

to the Eternal Wisdom? It would follow that there must be two Sons of God, in the absolute sense, which is impossible. Jesus was not, therefore, the Son of God when he was born of the virgin, but acquired that high dignity by virtue of his holiness. The Word was greater than Jesus, but Jesus was exalted by Wisdom. "There is no other mode of union between various natures and various persons except that which proceeds from the will, remaining pure from sin; Christ enjoyed union with God, and this oneness of the will in love is far higher than mere unity of nature. Jesus is the ideal man who flashes before our eyes the purest rays of Divine Wisdom."'

With this utterance of the third century compare the words of James Martineau, pre-eminently the prophet of the Unitarian faith: 'When it is said, of this personal appearance of Divine qualities of mind on the theatre and under the conditions of human life, that the "Word" itself "was made flesh and dwelt among us," the phrase simply affirms that these qualities are not mere earth-born and

animal phenomena, but are really the living word of a heavenly sphere, and speak of God. This is no more "a figure of speech" than the plainest sentence we can frame respecting things transcendent. I know not whether others can draw a sharp line of separation between the human spirit and the divine, and can clearly say where their own soul ends and God's communion begins. But for myself, with closest thought, I confess my darkness; and can only say that somehow he stirs among our higher affections and mingles with the action of our proper nature. If in Christ this divine margin was not simply broader than elsewhere, but spread until it covered the whole soul, and brought the human into moral coalescence with the Divine, then was God not merely represented by a foreign and resembling being; but personally there, giving expression to his spiritual nature, as in the visible universe to his causal power.' This comparison of utterances sixteen hundred years apart gives to the Unitarianism of Paul of Samosata no mean distinction.

We find the same insistence upon moral union with God in Artemon and in Beryllus, Bishop of Bostra. We are inclined to suspect there was good foundation for the statement of Artemon that this view was the faith of all the bishops of Rome to the time of Victor, the thirteenth in order, whose successor Zephyrinus formulated the Catholic theory, thereby corrupting the simplicity of faith. Zephyrinus was himself no more orthodox, but inclined to the opposite extreme of patripassianism. This claim of Artemon has much to support it in the writers of the second century, writers who lie under no suspicion of heresy.

A curious testimony to this early faith as Unitarian is to be found in Tertullian, who admits that his view is not easily or generally apprehended by the believers. His admission is singularly convincing. He says: 'The simple (I will not call them unwise and unlearned), who always constitute the majority of believers, are startled at the οἰκονομία (or dispensation of the

three in one) on the ground that their very rule of faith withdraws them from the world's plurality of gods to the one only true God; not understanding that, although he is an only God, he must yet be believed in with his own οἰκονομία. The numerical order and distribution of the Trinity they assume to be a division of the Unity; whereas the Unity which draws the Trinity out of its own self is so far from being destroyed that it is actually supported by it. They are constantly throwing out against us that we are preachers of two gods and three gods, while they take to themselves pre-eminently the credit of being worshippers of the one God.' Tertullian is referring to the common people to whom the Supreme and Eternal One revealed in Jesus Christ his Son was the ground of faith, and to whom no definition of God's inner Being, no theory of a new God in the world, could yet remove the conviction that a *new sense of God and a new regard for man* was the contribution Christianity had made to the world's happiness.

With this view we find a striking agreement in documents admitted to be the most precious relics of the faith of this time. The letter to Diognetus holds high rank, as a record of the faith of the second century, but there is no Trinitarianism in it. The 'Teaching of the Twelve' belongs to the same century, but the 'Mighty Maker' and his 'servant Jesus' sufficiently explain baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost as no declaration of Trinity in Unity. Even the celebration of the divinity in Christ which we encounter in Justin is not confused by any effort to make him the equal of the Father. For Justin declares, 'We worship and love next to God the Logos that is from the unbegotten and unutterable Deity, since for us he became man that he might share our sufferings and effect our cure.'

ORIGEN AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY

What is called 'Origen's Platonic taint' accords better with the thought of the

third century at large than with what is expected of it by later controversialists. To Origen 'God is the One Absolute Being, not supra-cosmic only but transcendental, the self-existent and self-sufficing monad, who alone contemplates himself in unchanging perfection, called in Scripture the Father. Even the Logos does not contemplate the Father, as the Father contemplates himself. The Son and Spirit are not necessary to the Father so far as he is absolute God, but only so far as he is Love, Father, Creator.' Here begins to appear the triumph of Greek philosophizing over the simplicity of Christian faith in its devotion to the person of Jesus Christ and its defence of his ideals with ethical passion. Origen and Tertullian are far nearer to the Nicene speculation than their contemporary Minucius Felix, who in that gem of dialogue, 'Octavius,' omits all the doctrines upon which the others most insist. He knows nothing of the Trinity, and hints only at the divinity of Christ or of the Holy Spirit. We cannot make the writers of

the third century speak the metaphysics of the post-Nicene Church. If we find a gratification of later claims in Origen and Tertullian and Athanasius, we find the failure of such expectation in most of the others. Even these champions of the Trinity are inconsistent with the orthodoxy of a later time. They repeatedly refer to the fall of man, as Jesus never did, so far as any record shows; but they did not make it the foundation of their system of thought as does modern orthodoxy, which collapses upon the disappearance of the original apostasy from innocence in Eden. These strenuous advocates of the Nicene tendency did not argue from the total corruption of human nature an atonement in any of the modern uses of the term; they did not reason from ruin to redemption, but rather from the original order and ideal to its realization in Jesus Christ. According to Origen the ransom for man is paid to Satan by God. 'The general characteristics of the theology of the second and third centuries are still liberty and diversity upon the

common ground of a living faith in Christ.'

Platonism had made God inaccessible: the later Greek thought made God inconceivable. It remained for Roman imperialism to make God unlovable. So, in a sense the Patripassians never dreamed, the Church 'sacrificed the Father' in the ardent longing to have a God lovable enough to be counted human, loving enough to be deemed divine.

ABSENCE OF ORTHODOX UNIFORMITY

There can be no proper orthodoxy where there is no uniformity in the Church, and that no unity in this sense existed is easily shown. As late as the second half of the second century 'catholic' does not mean 'orthodox' but 'universal.' It looks to church-extension, but does not imply uniformity of thought or form. Melito, who seems to recent writers the perfection of orthodoxy, was not orthodox to Origen or Tertullian. Origen was not orthodox to Tertullian, nor was Tertullian to the Bishop of Rome. His pupil Cyprian

defies Roman interference with Carthage; Minucius Felix omits the doctrines upon which both Origen and Tertullian insist. The 'Shepherd of Hermas' seemed to Irenæus in line with Scripture, but Tertullian thought it a recital of 'weak visions' and treated it with scorn. This difference was expressed by the parties to the contention in language neither elegant in form nor Christian in spirit.

The struggle against heresy was a struggle for the Unity of God, which was endangered by dualism, and for the real humanity of Christ, which was endangered by those who made his earthly life a mere phantom, 'an envelope for God.' The Fathers were not always clear as to their own belief or clear in its expression, but they saw what imperilled its essential principles; these, prevailing from first to last, are the Absolute Being of God and the real human life of Christ. On these points the Church maintained its faith and united, while dividing everywhere else.

Uniformity is not more evident if we turn to the councils. The synods between

the Nicene council, A.D. 325, and that at Constantinople, A.D. 381, were utterly without agreement as to what had been done at Nicæa; the council of Ephesus, A.D. 431, repudiated the work of Constantinople fifty years earlier and forbade the use of any other creed than the Nicene, promulgated in A.D. 325. Thus to-day that late creed called 'Athanasian' is under the interdict of the very council which determined the Nicene supremacy, and the Church which recites both in one service recites creeds which mutually exclude each other.

The statement of Dr. Martineau: 'To see the process of the formation of a doctrine is already to behold its dissolution,' comes constantly before the mind in such a survey as this. When you have the Egyptian triad, you have the easy illustration of what is soon to be the Christian Trinity. When you read the doom of Osiris and how his merits are claimed for the Osirians, you already see the germ of the vicarious atonement. The struggle between the pictorial triad (Egyptian) and

the philosophical trinity (Greek) is, from the later part of the third century on, the problem to be solved by speculative minds in the Christian Church. In its lowest form the result is mere tritheism, and so expresses itself in Art. In its subtler form, it is mere metaphysics, and separates itself from the human soul in the very effort at definition and symbolism. Unity loses its ethical value; its service to the intellect also declines, and that confusion ensues which has made Christian thought crystalline in its moments of devotion, and turbid in its efforts at theological uniformity. The centre of gravity was shifted, and men declared that intellectual accuracy is orthodoxy, while a holy life, without orthodoxy, is 'the devil's way of serving poison in a clean cup.' As in Egyptian, so in Christian thought: 'All that was needed was one more effort of abstraction, to put above and behind the triad the Being in whom it was resumed and into whom, so to speak, it melted; that higher Unity was sometimes found in the First Person of the triad, regarded as

reproducing itself by eternal generation; sometimes in a "Spirit more spiritual than the gods"; the holy soul which clothes itself with forms, but itself remains unknown' (G. d'Alviella, Hibbert Lectures, 1891).

DOGMAS AND CREEDS ESTABLISHED

In the period we are surveying, there appears a singular event. Rome is no longer the imperial centre, except for the Church. Constantinople grasps the sceptre and holds the throne. The world is Christian, but in a sense Jesus never knew and his apostles never intended. Alaric is Christian—and a barbarian. Honorius is a Christian theologian—and a craven soul. Soon there will be no empire but that of the Pope, an empire he disputes with the Eastern kings of Constantinople—a Christian empire in which Christ would have found a speedier crucifixion. It is the age of the great apostasy! An apostasy which boasted its orthodoxy and proved it upon the bodies of all who differed with its exponents. An apostasy

beyond doubt, in that the Unity of God had been lost to philosophic thought, and the Fatherhood of God sounded strange to hearts foreign to all compassion. The brotherhood of man had been swallowed up by the unclean doctrine of total depravity. The sublime doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the purifier of the heart had sunk into the theory of the dispensation of the Holy Ghost as a prerogative of the Church. The religion of the Man of Nazareth had been transformed into conflicting theories about his person for which councils contended with blows and scandalous uproar.

The simple religion which had transfigured the life of Israel's last great prophet, and from that pure heart of boundless benevolence had gone out to bless the world—this stream of pure affection, sprung at once from the remote past, and flowing afresh from the crystal fount of a sublime life, had now sunk as a desert stream in the sand. The stream was lost for ages underground, reappearing at intervals as a spring to flow for a little way,

but lost again and again in subtilties of speculation or impurities of life, or used only to move the machinery of Christian institutions.

Secular history calls the ages beginning with the sixth century 'dark.' But the history of the Church closes its short day before the light declines upon the imperial countenance of Constantine; when his politic edict is uttered the Church has confessed that the endorsement of a murderer can give it peace. The scenes of the arena show no longer the calm courage of martyrs upon the one side and the fierce hunger of the wild beasts upon the other. The conflict is transferred to the councils, where the antagonists all make the sign of the cross but shout opposing battle-cries of doctrinal contention, where surely 'the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.' Holiness of life is as nothing; but lips false in all other things speak the 'shibboleth' without stammering. The Church has decreed what *shall be* the rule of faith since it has forsaken what *was* the rule

of faith. Solemn processions march to the sanctuaries singing the doctrines in Greek doggerel; one party led by a gaunt Arian, the other by a fat eunuch of the Empress, meet in the streets of Alexandria and stone each other, while cries of 'homoiousian' and 'homoousian' proclaim that 'they slay each other for *an iota*.'

The Athanasian doctrine is at the flood, but it will find its ebb within this fourth century. While the Arian emperors re-establish the mongrel doctrines of Arianism, there appears upon the sky the afterglow of Paganism, which Julian vainly calls a new dawn, not knowing that the sun of Paganism is set. At the centres of power, Arianism again declines, but its missionaries are carrying a conviction that they teach 'the truth of the old Christians' to the hearts of the Goths. In the far-off forests of central Europe the work of Ulfilas will last when the decrees of the Arian emperors have been revoked at Rome.

The century closes; as the torn scroll

of its achievement is rolled together we read that the empire is divided between east and west; the great schools of theology are forging the arms for new contentions. Upon the vacant throne of Roman Imperialism in the west sits the Bishop of Rome. The world is Christian according to its own confession, and Pagan according to every test which the life of Jesus and his great words about God's love can supply. Two sounds accompany the opening decade of the new century. Alaric strikes with his sword-hilt upon the gates of Rome and demands the surrender of the Imperial city to the barbarian. Safe behind the marshes of Ravenna the emperor, Honorius, clucks to his chickens in their golden cages. The Church has gained a creed and lost an empire. Its monotheism has been swamped by its explanations about God. The reality of God is obscured by its definitions. Orthodoxy is established among the ruins of a divided Church. The perdition which had been declared to be the punishment of sin has now become

the penalty of a mistake. The only heresy which has nothing to recommend it has become in the period under review universal—the heresy which declares that intellectual accuracy is the condition of salvation and a formula of belief the guarantee of religion.

MODERN PHASES OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT[1]

It will probably surprise many readers to be told that the important word Atonement is a great stranger in the New Testament. It occurred in a single instance in the old or Authorized Version (Rom. v. 11) but has been excluded as incorrect from the Revised Version of 1881 and changed into the word Reconciliation. This, it may be, was the meaning intended by our translators of 1611, in their use of the former word: At-one-ment—putting-at-one, that is, reconciling, reconciliation. But this is not certain.

The term in question being gone, it may, however, be held that the subject-matter represented by it, the Doctrine of Atonement, nevertheless remains; and that it is in fact expressed or directly

[1] By G. Vance Smith, D.D.

implied in many a familiar verse, whether of the Authorized or of the Revised Version. This view of the case will doubtless be taken by those who read the New Testament expressions alluded to in the light of the received teaching of our time. The question then arises, *what* is the doctrine thus supposed to remain firmly embedded in the Christian books, even though the word which has so long been its accepted representative has been removed?

This question it is not so easy to answer as might at first sight appear. Theological writers differ from each other in an extraordinary way in their views as to what ought to be understood by this doctrine; they differ from each other so seriously as to create a presumption which is fatal to the authoritative character usually ascribed to it. For surely a doctrine which has been so diversely conceived and stated must in its original records be obscure and uncertain. The further presumption is inevitable, that a doctrine so vague and dark—a doctrine, moreover, which for

its exposition and defence needs all the elaborate treatment met with in modern works on the subject,[1] cannot be so essential a part of Christianity as it is commonly said to be. It is not reasonable to believe that any fact or dogma the right acceptance of which is a vital part of Christian faith can have been left to us in such a position that its holders and advocates should have to question and discuss among themselves, to differ widely from each other, even contradicting one another in their statements, as to what it is which is deemed so essential.

Here, however, a position of some importance is not to be overlooked. By some it is maintained that while the *fact* of the atonement is clearly affirmed in the New Testament, we are not called upon to supply a theory (i.e., a doctrine) to explain it. The Christian writers, it is admitted, do not explain it, but simply

[1] See among many others, Dr. R. W. Dale's Congregational Union Lectures (Ed. 1892); also the Essay on Atonement in 'Lux Mundi' (Ed. 1892).

declare as a truth of revelation that the forgiveness of sin is granted through, or in virtue of, the death of Christ.[1] But even if this be so, are we to be precluded from inquiring into the nature of so potent and interesting a cause and its related consequences? Granting the fact as alleged, it may still be asked, what sins are affected by it? Are they simply the breaches of that ancient ceremonial law of the Jews for which sacrifices and atonements were so carefully provided, and of which so much is said in the older Scriptures? or are they the more heinous sins of which men are still, as of old, so often and so terribly guilty?—or, again, does the forgiveness affect only the 'original guilt,' which, as some will tell us, every human being inherits through his descent from the first transgressor? If this last be the case, then certainly we ought to satisfy ourselves of the reality of that baneful inheritance. No slight enterprise! for its scientific absurdity and essential in-

[1] Thus Dr. R. F. Horton on the Atonement in the volume entitled 'Faith and Criticism.'

justice are demonstrable to every thoughtful and free-minded man.

Assuming, however, that sin in its worst and widest sense is intended, what is the 'forgiveness' for it which is said to result from the Death? Is there now *no punishment* for sin? Is the sinner permitted, in this life or any other, to *escape* the consequences of his wickedness?—or do not these still come home to him, seen or unseen by human eyes, and whether in this world or in that which is to be hereafter? If he is 'forgiven,' if punishment does not strike, what is the meaning of that future perdition of which theologians have had so much to tell? It has not surely ceased to await the sinner. If not, then we must conclude his sins are still visited by their punishment, and the alleged forgiveness is more in name than in reality.

It is impossible, therefore, to avoid the inquiry, what is the nature of the fact of atonement? Nor can we, as rational thinkers, escape the duty of ascertaining if possible, both what the fact is that is

alleged, and why it is so constantly presented to us as an all-essential element of Christian religion. All this again involves us in a theory, a doctrine, even in spite of ourselves, and whether it be purely speculative or legitimately founded on such positive historical considerations as may be within our reach. In short, the Atonement or Reconciliation in the New Testament is indeed and unquestionably a *fact*; but, as we hope to show in these pages, it is one which does not attribute evil-doing or injustice to God; nor is it one that is incapable of being rightly apprehended by man; it is such rather as any earnest, thoughtful reader of the Bible may reasonably be expected to inquire into, with a view to its defence and explanation.

UNSATISFACTORY EXPLANATIONS

It is easy to collect from the Christian books a multitude of expressions[1] which

[1] In the Appendix to Dr. Dale's work before referred to, a considerable list of such expressions will be found. Strange to say, little attempt is

speak of the death of Christ and connect that dread event more or less closely with the remission of sin. But, as already pointed out, it is admitted, and indeed is manifest on the face of the sacred page, that there is nowhere any definition of the nature of that connexion; no definite statement anywhere to be found in the Christian writings of the *how* or the *why* the death of Christ causes or accounts for that forgiveness. The explanations usually elaborated by theologians are too purely conjectural to be either satisfying or authoritative. We are repeatedly told, for example, by Dr. Dale, that 'the Death of Christ is the objective ground on which the sins of men are remitted.'[1] This is surely a little too vague, and fails to convey any clear idea to the reader. Nor is its vagueness relieved by the remarks

made in that work to investigate the meaning that would be attached to the words by a Jewish-Christian reader of Paul's time. The ordinary orthodox meaning of our day is simply *assumed*, with little allowance even for figurative language!

[1] 'The Atonement,' pp. lxii, lxiv, lxv.

which accompany the statement: 'The sufferings [of Christ] were his, that they might not be ours. He endured them that we might escape from them.' What sufferings that might be 'ours' are meant? Those of this present life are here with us in manifold forms, all over the world; they are seen in the miserable fruits of iniquity everywhere. We do *not* 'escape from them.' These actual or temporal sufferings of men are not therefore those from which the death of Christ has delivered them. Is it then the sufferings of a future world from which unrighteous men are saved? But according to popular orthodox teaching the torments of hell are not ended. Sinners innumerable are falling into the eternal fires every day, every hour of the world's existence. How then can it be said that sins are 'remitted,' or that men are 'delivered' from the consequences of their evil-doing, by the divine forgiveness of which the death of Christ is 'the objective ground'? This is an example of the singular inconsistency, or rather self-contradiction, involved in

popular teaching, even as found in the pages of one of the most able and earnest of its expounders.

Will it, however, be said that if men are 'lost,' it is their own fault?—that they have only to come to Christ, repent and 'believe' to secure their salvation, relying ever on the efficacy of the great sacrifice? that the atonement is therefore not fruitless, but effectual for all that will avail themselves of it? Be it so; but still it must be asked, What proportion of sinful men do this? How many, or how few, outside of the regions of Calvinistic theology, if any such regions are still left? How many, or how few comparatively of the world's thousand millions feel that they partake of this great conditional salvation? This question must here be left unanswered, but with one remark: so few, in comparison, must the 'saved' be, as only to show how purely unreal and nominal is the 'forgiveness' said to have been wrought for the world by the death of Christ, as set forth in the ordinary doctrine (or doctrines?) of atonement. How vain, there-

fore, is the pretence of his having borne 'the sufferings that ought to have been ours,' and released us from them!

But, indeed, the respected author from whom the above words are quoted, like many others before him, is fain to acknowledge the 'mystery' in which the whole subject is enveloped, and which, from his point of view, evidently baffles the efforts of such speculations—imaginative, arbitrary, and unauthorized as they are. Yes, indeed, the subject, as commonly treated, is surrounded by mystery enough; and this is not to be dissipated by conjectural theories, so purely artificial, so void of the element of justice—so entirely, in short, the product of human ignorance presuming to speak as if it were able to penetrate into the unfathomable depths of the Divine mind.

VARIOUS THEORIES AND STATEMENTS

The vagueness, logical inconsistency, and boldness in speculation just spoken of will be found to be largely exemplified

in various quarters, to which more especial attention must now be given.

(1) The Articles of the Church of England claim our notice as containing a long-established and widely received form of the atonement doctrine. Article II declares in relation to Christ that he 'truly suffered . . . to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of men.' Article XXXI reads thus: 'The offering of Christ, . . . is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world both original and actual.' The idea intended by some of these terms is by no means self-evident. But the doctrine contained in them at least implies that God needed to be 'reconciled,' which again must imply that he was in some sense angry with men on account of their sins, but that Christ by his sufferings and death propitiated, that is, appeased, him and in some way, satisfied him, in regard to all the sins of the whole world. Truly a gross and anthropomorphic conception of the great Father of spirits—one not un-

worthy of those ancient days when a Jupiter or an Apollo was supposed to be pleased with a hecatomb of slaughtered victims.

(2) This interpretation of the two Articles is justified by the words of an eminent expositor of the teaching of our national Church, the late Archbishop Thomson of York. 'The clouds of God's anger,' he writes, 'gathered thick over the whole human race; they discharged themselves on Jesus only. . . . He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. . . . He who alone was no child of wrath meets the shock of the thunderstorm, becomes a curse for us, and a vessel of wrath, and the rays of wrath break out of that thunder gloom, and shine on the bowed head of him who hangs on the cross dead for our sins.' Again the Archbishop writes, 'He came to reconcile men and God by dying on the cross for them, and bearing their punishment in their stead. . . . The wrath of God was against man, but it did not fall on man. . . . Jesus suffered though men had sinned.'[1] In such terrible language

[1] 'Aids to Faith,' p. 332.

as this it is plain that we have the principle of substitution and vicarious punishment in no doubtful form. The Divine Father inflicts upon the innocent Jesus the penalty of suffering which ought to have fallen on sinful men and these are permitted to escape. 'And thus,' the Archbishop adds, 'the Atonement was a manifestation of Divine justice'!

(3) But then, strange to say, this exposition of the doctrine is *denied* by another eminent member of the same Church. The late Archbishop Magee (also of York), dismisses in the strongest language 'the notion of the transfer of penalties from one person to another'—virtually rejecting the incredible and baseless theory of his predecessor. Dr. Magee refers all, not to the *wrath*, but to the *love* of God;[1] but how or why the Infinite Love should have demanded the fearful propitiation of suffering and death, and that too from

[1] Dr. Horton also repudiates this idea of the wrath of God as 'revolting.'—'Faith and Criticism,' p. 211.

such a victim as Jesus, the Archbishop does not explain.[1]

(4) Another eminent pillar of the English establishment agrees, however, with Archbishop Thomson in laying the chief stress on the substitution of Christ in bearing the punishment due to sinners and thus satisfying the claims of Divine justice. 'The idea of substitution,' Bishop Ellicott writes, 'can never be eliminated from any true doctrine of the Atonement' ('Salutary Doctrine,' pp. 75–6).

(5) Leaving these great Church dignitaries thus to disagree with each other as to the nature of the Atonement, we may turn to another learned prelate of the same Church who has written on the subject, and ask which side of the discussion he takes. Bishop Thorold (of Winchester) appears to set little value on the sufferings of Christ. He does not think that pain, as pain, avails to satisfy or propitiate the Divine Being. It was 'the beauty of the perfect sacrifice, the filialness

[1] 'Helps to Belief: The Atonement,' by W. C. Magee, D.D., etc., 1887.

of the submitted will, the spotless holiness, . . . that was the acceptable and sufficient atonement in the sight of a Holy God' ('Good Words,' 1891, pp. 214, 215). The Bishop does not give us his authority for these statements, but quotes in explanation of his meaning the words of a hymn—

> I lay my sins on Jesus,
> The spotless lamb of God;
> He bears them all and frees us
> From the accursed load.

He then proceeds, 'When I cast my guilt on him, he puts his righteousness on me; for my sins he exchanges his obedience. Having made peace through the blood of his cross, he bestows that peace on me and I am at rest.' The Bishop gives no Scripture warrant for these very positive assertions; but it is clear that we have here again the unmoral idea of substitution—unmoral, because the conscience, even of ill-trained, ordinary men, feels it to be outrageously wrong to put guilt and its punishment upon one who has done no evil, and to let the guilty man go free; unmoral again, because even among im-

perfect and sinful men such a thing as vicarious punishment, the punishment of one man for another would not be tolerated, and it may safely be said is never practised by civilized men who have any regard for justice in their treatment of wrongdoers.

(6) Other examples of inconsistency, or of vagueness, or also sometimes of self-contradiction, in the statements of various exponents of the Atonement are easily found. The 'Declaration of Faith,' for instance, issued by the Congregational Union, expresses the doctrine of a large and important section of English Nonconformists. It informs us respecting Christ that 'by his obedience to the Divine Law while he lived and by his sufferings unto death he meritoriously obtained eternal redemption for us, having thereby vindicated and illustrated Divine justice, magnified the law and brought in everlasting righteousness.' The ideas thus expressed, somewhat dark in themselves, may be interpreted by the doctrinal schedule of a model deed for chapel trusts of the same denomination. This speaks

plainly of the 'fall and depravity of man,' of Christ's 'sacrificial death for the sins of mankind,' and of 'everlasting punishment,' but how 'everlasting righteousness' was 'brought in,' it does not explain, nor is it very easy to understand, considering the vice and wickedness now prevailing even in the so-called Christian world!

Similar doctrines are held by the Wesleyan communion. These tell us of the miserable consequences of sin, through which 'all mankind are under the wrath and curse of God, and so are made liable to the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell hereafter' (Wesleyan 'Catechism,' No. 2). From these consequences we are to be redeemed by faith in Christ, and by our participation in his righteousness, the good fruit of faith. Here we have substitution again, the sinful put in the place of the righteous on the same easy conditions as affirmed by Bishop Thorold.

(7) An interesting addition to these views of the Atonement has been afforded by the writings of a certain section of the national

clergy. These writers practically dissent from the more usual teaching of the churches, and as it would appear, from the statements of their own Articles, as above cited. They maintain very freely, and no doubt, truly, that there can be nothing meritorious in mere suffering; that suffering in the form of physical or mental agony cannot be thought peculiarly acceptable to God. The sufferings and death of Christ, therefore, are not to be regarded as that which pleased or satisfied the all-merciful Father; nor did Jesus, in short, suffer and die as the Article states 'to reconcile his Father to us.' It was not this which constituted the propitiatory efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. It was his voluntary obedience and humiliation, his submission even unto death, his renunciation of his own and acceptance of the Father's will. This moral element it was which made his death an acceptable sacrifice, and upon this did God look down with grace and satisfaction. 'In the whole of the two Testaments' (thus it is affirmed) 'there is not a single passage

which states unambiguously the doctrine that Christ received at God's hands the punishment decreed to our sins and thus enabled him to forgive us.'[1]

This last representation is in substance correct; but it is by no means so *new* as to many persons it might have appeared when coming from clerical pens. Similar expositions of the Christian teaching, and similar protests against popular perversions of it have long been familiar in certain quarters—among those however who have not had the advantage of speaking from the national pulpits, and who indeed have been mostly looked upon as the merest heretics, standing outside of the pale of Christianity. Here is a passage from one of the writers and preachers of the older times alluded to, taken from a tract by the late Dr. Lant Carpenter.[1] 'It is nowhere declared that the death of Christ . . . enabled God to forgive; that God

[1] The reader is referred to 'The Bible and its Theology' (1892) for various works on which these statements are founded, in cases where the works are not again expressly cited.

could not forgive sin without a satisfaction by the vicarious punishment of an innocent person. It is nowhere declared that the sufferings of Christ were a punishment at all, . . . it is nowhere declared that the death of Christ appeased the wrath of God, rendered him propitious, made him merciful, or disposed him to forgive.'

(8) Among the more recent theorizers on the nature and effects of the Atonement, the eloquent writer in the work entitled 'Lux Mundi' holds a notable place. The Saviour, he gives us to understand, bore the sufferings entailed by sin, 'not that we might be freed from them,'[1] but 'that he might lead man along the same path of suffering, not "free" but gladly submissive to the pains which but for him would be the overwhelming penalties of our sins.' Thus then man is not released from the sufferings consequent on sin, but only taught or led to submit to them

[1] The reader will compare this with the words cited from Dr. Dale: to the effect that Christ bore the sufferings that might have been ours 'That we might *escape* from them.'

gladly! It is not clear whether the sufferings of this life are meant or those of the future. As to the latter, whether the sufferings of the future world can be borne by the sinner 'gladly' or sadly, nothing can be known, though some writers have gone so far as to speak of 'happiness in hell.' Supposing, however, the sufferings of this life to be meant, it is clear that the Atonement, as already pointed out, has brought to man no great result.

For again it must be asked, have not men still to suffer much as of old? Is not sin still, as ever, followed by its terrible retributions, as seen too often in the experience of common life? If, however, man is not benefited in point of suffering, by the Atonement, perhaps we should at least conclude that, in some mysterious way, God is so! His insulted justice is 'satisfied' by the sufferings of the righteous substitute, and so he can let the guilty go free: as in the words of Bishop Thorold's hymn, the sinner lays his sins on Jesus and himself escapes. This may not be expressly alleged in the Essay now

referred to, but it is involved and bound up in this speculative theory as in others. And thus, so far as can be learnt from 'Lux Mundi,' the great scheme of salvation by the sacrifice of Christ is but an empty name, without substantial results, and at the same time contrary to nature and to the healthy, rational instincts of the unsophisticated mind.

For truly the cultivated reason and conscience clearly pronounce it to be wrong to put the penal consequences of sin, not on the guilty man, but on another who is substituted for him. To do this, moreover, involves a twofold wrong: it 'charges God foolishly' with acting in a way which civilized law and the moral feeling of mankind alike repudiate; and it makes the sinner, the guilty man, who has the supposed benefit of this injustice, fill the purely selfish part of profiting by his own wrong; that is to say, by the sufferings and death of another, to which his own evil conduct is a contributing factor. With unthoughtful and superstitious minds, the tendency of such ideas,

whether in this modified 'Lux Mundi' form or any kindred form, can only be to encourage sin rather than to repress it. But we may rejoice to believe such ideas are no part of the Christian Gospel. They belong to the ages of ancient ignorance; and in whatever connexion they may be presented, whether in the Articles and Creeds of established churches, or in the doctrinal formulas of nonconformist bodies, they are out of harmony with a religion which inculcates a spiritual worship and the practical doing of the will of God as the only true way to win his blessing.

CONFLICTING THEORIES

At the commencement of this Essay notice was taken of the Atonement theory as elaborated by Dr. Dale. This, we have seen, informs us that the death of Christ is 'the objective ground' of the remission of sin. The expression, it is evident, adds nothing to the New Testament statements, which affirm that Christ 'died for us,' or 'died for our sins.' It simply repeats the latter in a different form of words and

leaves the idea where it was. Apart from this, the theory of Dr. Dale is not in its details found satisfactory by a friendly critic, whose name has been already introduced in these pages. Dr. Horton, speaking with all respect and sympathy of the views of his co-religionist, yet dissents materially from his statements. He gives the following account of Dr. Dale's theory. The passage is quoted here, with the omission for brevity's sake, of a few non-essential words :—

'In the concluding chapters [of Dr. Dale's volume] . . . the author attempts to lay down a theory to explain the fact of the Atonement on which he has been insisting. The theory is a modification of Anselm's. The eternal law of righteousness takes the place of the personal honour of God. This law is violated by sin and must be repaired by some satisfaction offered to it. The sufferings of Christ offer this reparation. But how and why? Briefly because the person of Christ is identical with the law of righteousness on the one hand, and on the other Christ

himself holds an essential relation to the human race which was originally made in his image.[1] In place of the punishment which should rightly fall on man from the violated law of righteousness, the law itself in the person of Jesus endures the sufferings which punishment would have entailed. "In the death of Christ he to whom it belongs to inflict suffering endures suffering instead of inflicting it."'

The reader will observe the final sentence of this paragraph. It is taken *verbatim* from the work cited (Dale, 'Atonement,' p. 393). There is more to a similar effect in the same context. Assuming that the words have their ordinary meaning, it is passing strange that any well instructed man should write such a sentence: 'He to whom it belongs to inflict suffering

[1] It is hardly necessary to point out that this implied reference to Gen. i. 26 involves a departure from the original purport of that verse. The expression is anthropomorphic; the same words for *image* and *likeness* being used as in Gen. v. 1, 3, where Seth is said to have been born in the 'image' of Adam. Besides how does it appear that the Elohim of Gen. i. was Christ?

endures suffering instead of inflicting it'; that is to say God (in Christ) inflicts suffering upon himself! How purely conjectural and imaginary these statements are, how entirely unwarranted by anything in the New Testament, will to many persons appear self-evident. Dr. Horton observes, 'The theory does not satisfy the reader.' He further objects, 'We are still without any valid instance in human experience to illustrate how a broken *law* can be repaired by suffering the penalty which it ought to inflict. . . . conceding that God is bound by his own nature to punish sins we cannot see the intrinsic reasonableness of himself suffering instead of inflicting the punishment, or how from self-inflicted pain he derives the power to forgive sins' (Horton, 'Essay,' pp. 96–7).

These objections are mildly put. The theory to which they apply is not merely a pure speculation, without foundation in the New Testament; is it not in two words entirely fanciful and incredible, if not absurd?

Dr. Horton himself proceeds on much

safer ground. He is contented to point out that the mystery of the Atonement is insoluble. It is not, he tells us, explained in the Christian books: 'The New Testament *has no theory about the Atonement.*' These words he emphasizes; and again observes, '. . . the orthodoxy of the New Testament does not include a theory of the Atonement at all' (p. 222). Such statements clearly amount to an abandonment of all the older 'orthodox' ideas on this subject. Thus do these two eminent theologians neutralize or refute one another! It can hardly improve matters, from Dr. Horton's point of view, to insist as he does, that while no theory (or doctrine) of Atonement can be formulated, yet that the *fact* of atonement remains the same and undisturbed; that the fact is there though the *theory* be gone! On this position some remarks have been made in the first section of this Essay, and we need not go over the ground a second time.

In spite of this disclaimer on the part of an earnest believer in the ordinary idea of Atonement, theories, that is, doctrines,

embodying that idea abound, as we have sufficiently seen in the foregoing pages. Such theories are not to be dismissed or put out of court by a mere refusal to see them, or by a verbal denial of them. Inconsistent, self-contradictory, unwarranted as they are, they stand there, enduring monuments of the speculative folly of those who would be wise above what is written.

As the result of these considerations, the conclusion remains as certain as anything of the kind can be, that the older forms of the doctrine of Atonement—including such ideas as vicarious punishment, propitiation, satisfaction of the Divine wrath or justice, expiation of one man's sin by the sufferings of another, and so forth—are not tenable; and that some other explanation of the New Testament language respecting the death of Christ must be sought. Is it attainable?

Before proceeding to answer this question, it will be well to take notice of several points not yet made sufficiently prominent.

(1) The writers hitherto named seem to

agree very much in one respect, although they differ from each other so seriously as we have seen. Our authorities, episcopal and nonconformist, all speak of the 'mystery' in which their subject is involved. This admission, in various forms, is of frequent occurrence in their writings. Bishop Thorold, as before cited, admits that it is impossible in such a subject for the human intellect fully to understand—what he, nevertheless, and others write so freely about—or to avoid inconsistency and self-contradiction. And what other result could be anticipated where licence is so readily given to ingenious theorizing—combined, as it is, with a singular forgetfulness of the historical conditions of the problem? The speculative theologian laying aside considerations of ordinary morality—those usual dictates of the rational conscience by which men are guided in common life—feels himself at liberty to discuss and expound the very thoughts and motives of the Divine Mind. Dr. Dale goes so far as to speak of its being 'possible for God at once to endure and

to inflict penal suffering, and to do both under conditions which constitute the infliction and the endurance the grandest moment in the moral history of God' ('Atonement,' p. 393). The closing words of this sentence are amazing, but they will hardly bear comment. What does, or can, any mortal mind really know of 'the moral history of God'? Is it an essential part of that history to represent the Divine Being as following modes of proceeding from which sinful man would shrink with horror and detestation—as, for example, in inflicting the disproportionate and monstrous punishment of everlasting misery for the sins of a short lifetime, or in putting the unutterable weight of suffering due to a guilty world upon one innocent and righteous person, who, moreover, according to the record, did not submit unreluctantly, but prayed in his agony that the cup might pass from him?

(2) It cannot escape notice how artificial and arbitrary are the reasons assigned, under these doctrinal schemes, for the Divine forgiveness of sin. A victim is

made to suffer, and God forthwith accepts and pardons the sinner, provided that he by his assent and 'faith' participates in some sense in the act of sacrifice. But what essential connexion, logical, causal, or moral, is there, or can there be, between the slaughter or the agonies of an animal or any other conceivable victim, on the one side, and the changed attitude of the Supreme towards sin on the other? There is nothing here, in truth, but what is imaginary, unfounded in any principle of right or reason, and—must it not be said—unnatural and superstitious.

(3) And then comes the climax, as already pointed out: the consequences of sin are *not*, after all, really remitted to the sinner. These have to be borne all the same. Sinful men, according to popular teaching, are daily dying and passing into the eternal suffering, the 'atonement' that has been made notwithstanding. God, we are told, is enabled by the great sacrifice to forgive in accordance with his supreme justice, yet he does not forgive—unless it be to a select few who are

said to have 'faith' in this marvellous scheme of so-called atonement, and who by virtue of their faith are enabled to appropriate its saving virtues to themselves—faith, which in many a case, or in most, may be unenlightened and purely superstitious.

(4) System-making theologians do not seem duly to recognize the great fact that a certain punishment for sin is in truth mercifully bound up with our nature—appointed for the sinner by the Creator himself. It is not indeed such as to overpower the freedom of our own human will, to prevent us in advance by a kind of force from doing wrong. But it gives the sinner warning by the uneasiness which attends or anticipates conscious wrongdoing, or by the remorse and the sense of unworthiness which follow wrongdoing, and from which in all probability even the most untrained and callous are not wholly exempt. This kind of punishment comes sooner or later—a dread reality of the Divine government. It is not to be averted by the sacrifice of victims, or by

its transfer to another party. And it suggests to us in no doubtful way what is the true expiation of sin before the All-righteous; for that this can only be in the sinner's return to right ways, in his penitence, his resistance of passion and self-indulgence, his seeking to undo or remedy the wrong he has done to another, his turning to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. Such is the true expiation of sin, the true propitiation. Thus does the prophet of old teach us; and this, too, may be plainly seen in the clear light of that gracious spirit—the spirit of Christ—which so emphatically declares that obedience is better than sacrifice.

THE NEW TESTAMENT LANGUAGE

It remains to inquire whether, apart from all speculation, the Christian writings do not themselves afford the means of removing the 'mystery' before spoken of, and of substituting for unwarranted conjecture something that is based upon reasonable historical evidence.

It is hardly necessary to begin with the remark that it is right to interpret Scripture in the sense in which it was originally intended; and that the sacred books should be read therefore in the light of such historical considerations as are known to us—considerations relating to the circumstances, the persons, the ideas, the prejudices, the ignorance, of the times in which the books were written. This position is usually conceded, as a matter of course, though too often forgotten, especially by those who have a systematic theology to build up. It has long been acknowledged by Biblical scholars of the highest class, from Bishop Marsh downwards to Bishop Ellicott in our own day.

Let us then remember, in the first place, that it was not expected by the people of Christ's time that the Messiah would die. In John xii. 34, this belief is referred to. So, when Jesus spoke to his disciples of his going up to Jerusalem to be crucified and put to death, we are told that 'they understood none of these things' (Luke xviii. 34). But the crucifixion brought

them understanding. In time their eyes were opened, and they were led to the belief that their master must needs pass from this earthly life before he could enter upon his spiritual kingdom. They learnt that Jesus died in his mortal body, in order that he might be raised again, and, 'ascending up on high,' might become the spiritual 'Head over all things to the Church,' that he might reign over all as the spiritual Christ. By birth, he was a Jew; he was 'born under the law,' and he was subject naturally to the same restraints in regard to intercourse with the heathen world which were conceived to attach to all of Jewish race. Of the outcast Gentile nations, none could of right be disciples of the Christ, the Jewish Messiah; and the limitation would appear to have been recognized by Jesus himself: 'I am not sent,' he said, 'but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' In accordance with these ideas, the centurion Cornelius was ritually 'unclean,' and in a state of sin, though 'a just man, and one that feared God.' He was not admissible,

therefore, as a disciple of the Christ, a subject of the Messiah, without first in effect conforming to Judaism. Even an apostle is represented as saying to him that it was an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew to keep company with, or come unto, one of another nation. (See Acts x., xi.) And we know from Gal. i., ii. that the same apostle, on a later occasion, found it a hard task to rise above this prejudice. Thus all who were not by birth or conversion Jews were only as 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,' 'strangers' who could have no part in those 'covenants of promise' which God had given to his chosen people. They could not therefore, 'by nature' (in their Gentile state) be disciples of a Hebrew Messiah. To become such, they must first enter into the fold of Israel, and thus put away the ritual disqualification, the state of sin, attaching to them as Gentiles. In illustration of these statements, see again Acts xv., Eph. ii.

Such was the strong prejudice of the primitive Christian times. Had it pre-

vailed with all the early Christians, it would have led to the perversion and ultimate extinction of the new religion. But the death of the Messiah enabled his followers to conceive of the relation in which he stood to the Gentile world as having undergone a great change. Being dead and ascended to his heavenly throne, he was no longer a mortal man, a Jew, under the Law of his people. The Apostle Paul alludes to this in several expressions. The earliest statement in which this altered conception is involved occurs in the Epistle to the Romans: 'Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man so long as he liveth?' Thus he writes, and he goes on to state in illustration how that one who is dead is released from the law, just as a wife who had been bound to her husband is freed from similar restraints by his death. In a previous verse, Paul speaks of those who are 'baptized into Jesus Christ,' as 'baptized into his death,' as partaking of his death, and being 'dead with Christ,'

and with him, therefore, dead to the law. (Rom. vi., vii.; Col. ii. 20.)

The death of the Christ had thus a twofold operation. Him it released from the law, and it released others also. Partaking of his death by baptism, they too are freed from the control of the law. They may live now, not to the law, but 'in newness of spirit,' and 'unto God.' Such was the 'mystery' of 'a crucified Christ,' which mystery 'had been hid from ages and from generations' (Eph. iii. 3–12). The risen and exalted Saviour now reigns over all men alike. He is accessible, not by Jewish rites of circumcision or other ritualistic 'works,' but by simple 'faith'—the belief and reverence of discipleship. Jew and Gentile are henceforth alike to him. 'There is no difference' in God's sight, or in Christ's. If they will receive the Messiah by the faith, the love, the obedience proper to the disciple, this will admit them to his kingdom and his church. God (the apostle writes) will freely forgive past sins of disqualification to all, whether ritual or

actual, for that faith of theirs in the risen Christ (Rom. iii., viii. 34 ; x. 9–12).

Let it next be observed how strong was the feeling of the Jews in reference to their own righteousness and the sinfulness of the outside world. 'Sinners of the Gentiles' ; 'dead in trespasses and sins' ; 'by nature children of wrath.' Such are the phrases in which this feeling is expressed. (Eph. ii.) But, then, the Jews too, in Paul's view, were 'under sin.' 'By the works of the law' could no flesh be really justified (made righteous), for 'by the law is the knowledge of sin.' But a merciful God, the apostle taught, had opened out a new way of justification, independently of the law, to all who would accept Jesus as Christ, that is to say, by 'faith in Christ Jesus.' This, too, was done by the All-wise 'freely, by his grace.' It was not a purchased boon : it was not because his 'wrath' was appeased or satisfied by the sacrifice or sufferings of any victim. This is nowhere stated in the Christian books. 'It is the *gift* of God,' not a thing bought with a price, except in

so far as this might be figuratively said (1 Cor. vi. 20, vii. 23). Nothing in all the New Testament is clearer than the doctrine of the free and unpurchased nature of the Christian redemption, as on the side of God, and this is in truth the central fact of the glad tidings. The words 'for Christ's sake,' so common in modern theological phrases, do not occur in the New Testament in reference to any act or motive of God.[1]

Faith in the risen Christ then, according to these Pauline ideas conferred an equal or a better 'justification' upon sinful Gentiles as well as upon Jews, and this qualified them all alike for discipleship. The barrier of the law which had kept them apart was broken down by the death of the Christ, because he was now released from the law, and it had no longer dominion over him or over them. And this had come to pass, and could only be by the death of the Messiah which released

[1] Eph. iv. 32, in the Authorized Version is only a mistranslation for 'in (by) Christ.'—See the Revised New Testament.

him from the claims of the law. Thus he died *for* them; he died for '*all*,' Gentiles as well as Jews.

It may now be seen, without further exposition, in what sense Christ died, 'the just for the unjust.' He died in their behalf, for their benefit; it might even be said that he died in their *stead*—a phrase, however, which occurs only once, Matt. xx. 28, parallel with Mark x. 45. His death, admitting men to the new justification by faith, Rom. x. 6–9, saved them in effect from the punishment which would otherwise justly have fallen upon them. *They* deserved to suffer, but God was merciful, and he permitted his Son, Messiah, to suffer instead—*not* as bearing their *punishment*, which is nowhere alleged, but simply to open a new way of admission for them; *not* therefore as their substitute, not to redeem them from eternal misery, and *not* (as Archbishop Thomson would affirm) because the clouds of God's wrath gathered thick over the human race and required a victim and could find that victim only in Jesus. It was simply because the

Divine love, by the death of the Messiah, opened out a new justification, that of Faith, and provided that all men of every nation might be admissible by this new way to the fold of the spiritual Christ, even though they were 'sinners,' and *he* were the Jewish Messiah born 'under the law.'

Such was the fundamental conception which lay at the base of the early Christian belief—a conception perfectly intelligible and rational in the light of the then prevailing ways of thought and reasoning, though it has lost much of its cogency and applicability in these modern times, with their altered ideas and circumstances.

This effect of the Death in admitting the Gentiles to discipleship is alluded to in a great variety of expressions, partly literal, partly only figurative. Everything which the ancient sacrifices were supposed to do in connexion with the pardon of sin is said to result from the death of the Messiah, and a great deal more. Jesus is 'the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world'—being thus in evident metaphor likened to the

victim slain in the sacrifices of atonement under the ancient law. 'He was made sin for us' (that is, by a probable Hebraism, he was condemned, treated as a sinner). He was 'made a curse for us,' because every one that is hanged on a tree, as he was, was accounted accursed. He 'bare our sins in his own body on the tree,' and by his stripes 'we are healed':—all these figurative expressions being simply various ways of conveying the same radical thought. It was the sins of men, ritual as well as moral, actual or only imputed, which unfitted them to be his disciples, so long as he was in life, a Hebrew under the law: his death released *him* from this restraint and permitted *them* to become his disciples. He thus, in an obvious sense, 'bare' their sins and delivered them from the condemnation which the law was understood to pronounce on all sin. Thus too he is 'our peace' and 'ye [Gentiles] who sometime were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ,' Eph. ii. He is 'a propitiation (or propitiatory sacrifice) set forth in (or by) his blood'—and through him 'we

have received the reconciliation,' Rom. iii. 25, in Revised Version; also Rom. v. 11.

There is a great variety of such phrases, nearly all of a figurative character, but nowhere necessarily conveying the old orthodox ideas of atonement.

There is nothing in them to tell us that the heavenly Father needed *propitiating*, in the heathen sense of this word; nothing to tell us that the sacrifice of Christ was made 'to reconcile his Father to us,' or that it was in its essence a punishment borne by him, whether for 'original guilt' or for 'the actual sins of men.' The reconciliation effected is that of man to God, not of God to man; as Paul writes, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.'

The expressions under notice are numerous and varied. The Christian writers fell into them quite naturally; or rather, we should say, they were unavoidable to men familiar with the sacrificial usages of their nation. The error of later times has been in taking so many of them in a literal and purely modern sense; in allowing so little

for Jewish forms of thought and feeling; in overlooking the historical considerations which alone can give true life and meaning to the expressions referred to; and in substituting, for such considerations, theories and doctrines, which are purely arbitrary, to say nothing of the fact that the subjects to which they relate are wholly beyond the reach or the grasp of human thought.

The exposition above given has been derived from the more important Epistles of Paul, those to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, in particular. It would appear, however, that in some of the later New Testament writings what may be termed an expansion of the earlier doctrine respecting the death is to be traced. Expressions occurring in the narratives of the Supper, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the Fourth Gospel, and in the First Epistle of John would seem to convey the ideas of expiation and atonement in the old Hebraic sense. The remark also applies to phrases in the book of Revelation and in the Epistles of Peter. On the other

hand it should be noticed how entirely absent from the account of the crucifixion is any allusion to the supposed expiatory character of the event related, as this has been ordinarily represented by theologians. In the Fourth Gospel, for example, the long narrative of the trial and its results gives not the slightest intimation that the death on the cross was in any sense a sacrifice possessed of some occult propitiatory or atoning efficacy. How is such an omission, in such a writing, so long after the event, to be accounted for, on the common theory as to its marvellous nature? The same is true of the other Gospels. Dr. Horton seems to make light of this omission, asking only why so much circumstantial prominence is given in the Gospels to 'the exit' of Jesus from life. This question he asks, but without suggesting the answer which ought to have been forthcoming! Doubtless, we may reply, the deep interest of the scenes depicted, the character of the sufferer, the natural human sympathy awakened in the spectators, are sufficient to account for the detail with

which the story is related. But on the ordinary orthodox supposition as to the efficacy of the cross, is it possible to conceive that the evangelical narratives should have made no allusion whatever either to the Divine nature of the sufferer or to the world-wide consequences of his death, that they should have left out of sight the greatest, most stupendous fact of all—if it were only real—that in that crucified Jesus, who is there nailed to the cross and there bows his head and dies, just like one of the malefactors beside him, that in his person, thus lifted up and crucified, it is not simply a human being that we are looking upon, but even God himself?—that in his sufferings and death there is consummated the redemption of the world? The writers of these narratives it is alleged, knew all this, but they say nothing about it! They were writing for the information of succeeding generations of disciples, but they make no allusion to it! They were writing many years after the event, when there was no conceivable reason for withholding their testimony, when there was

every conceivable reason for proclaiming it to their readers, and yet they fail to give us the remotest hint as to the true character of the occurrence of which they speak. Not one word proceeds from them respecting that greatest fact of all, compared with which everything else sinks into utter insignificance.

Yet, as before observed, it is easy to think that a certain expansion of the Pauline doctrine, did, in the course of time, take place. The idea of atonement in the older sense, could hardly fail to occur sooner or later, to Jewish-Christian writers, in connexion with an event which to their minds operated so plainly for the virtual remission of sins, in the sense above indicated. It may even be that Paul himself had in his mind, in some instances, the more literal sacrificial meaning of words which he uses; while yet their practical significance as he uses them had reference simply to the release of the Messiah and the redemption of the disciple from the claims of the law. Many of the expressions now in view are unquestionably

figurative (as Rev. i. 5, I Pet. i. 19, ii. 24), the only question being what is the exact literal thought which they really cover. It may be the ordinary idea of expiation. Adopting this view of the subject, the reader may understand that the death of Christ would gradually come to be spoken of as possessed of a certain sacrificial efficacy. In effect it redeemed from the condemnation due to sin, those to whom it was the means of giving access to Christ by faith. The thought of this would readily take the form of expiation in minds already preoccupied with the ancient beliefs connected with sacrifices. Disciples of Jewish birth would naturally incline to this mode of thought, and be led in the result to the use of words implying the old ideas of expiation and propitiation by the sacrifice of victims. Such ideas would find acceptance with Gentile converts also. Nevertheless, do they not conflict with the higher sense of the Divine Fatherhood and Love, even as these were entertained and expressed by Christ himself, and by him who was the greatest of his apostles?

It is obvious from the foregoing exposition how vain must be the attempt to build up upon the New Testament language respecting the death of Christ the elaborate speculative structures to be found in modern works on the subject; theories about the wrath of God; about the transfer of punishment from the guilty sinner to an innocent substitute; about the confidential arrangement between God and Christ for the rescue of a miserable world from the dominion of Satan; about 'the grandest moment in the moral history of God';—all such ideas as these being simply the wild and presumptuous flights of non-scriptural theology, and entirely without warrant in the Christian writings.

It is well again to observe, as a final consideration, that the various expressions which have now been briefly reviewed, arose out of very special feelings, and circumstances of the primitive Christian times. Those expressions formed in effect an argument most suitable to Jewish converts of Paul's time. But their permanent value is unimportant—except only

as they imply or set forth in a peculiar way the essential impartiality and comprehensiveness of the Gospel. There is nothing known to us in the actual or natural relations of God and man which can make it incumbent upon the modern disciple to return to the forms of thought embodied in such language. Its entire force and propriety belonged to, and are exhausted in connexion with circumstances, feelings, institutions, persons, that have long since passed away from the stage of mortal existence, leaving nothing behind them in which such phraseology can in our time have any fitting use or application. Nobody now, however 'ritualistic' he may be, will doubt that a man may be a Christian without being circumcised, or conforming in any other way to the ceremonial law.[1] If there were a great sect among us

[1] Yet our Congregational friends appear to find it expedient to proclaim that 'they are justified through faith in Christ' . . . and *not* by 'the works of the law.'—It might almost seem that some one had been seeking to impose upon them the ancient yoke, as happened to the Galatians of old!—'Declaration of Faith,' xiii.

maintaining this, then we might plead that Christ 'died for us,' that he has redeemed us from the curse of the law, 'being made a curse for us,' that 'we have redemption through his blood,' that a new 'justification' has been provided for us admitting to discipleship 'without the deeds of the law.' But such phrases cannot now be used with any rational force or sense. They belong to the past; and the sooner the past is left in quiet possession of them by popular teachers and preachers of every name and degree, the better surely it will be for the credit of Christian learning and the peace of the Church.

DITHEISM

Considering the great position which the Atonement has held in systematic theology from Luther downwards, it is a little surprising to find how lightly the subject is passed over in the comprehensive and elaborate work of Dr. Fairbairn.[1] So

[1] 'The Place of Christ in Modern Theology.' By A. M. Fairbairn, D.D., etc., 1894.

much is this the case, in the few pages devoted to it (479–492), that the question is suggested whether or not the respected author can regard the doctrine as possessed of the supreme importance usually ascribed to it, and which, if it were a great truth of Christian theology, would really belong to it. Besides this, such exposition as there is in this volume presents far too much of the same kind of speculative, arbitrary, and semi-metaphysical treatment which is so common in works on the subject and which has been noticed more fully in our preceding pages. There is a singular absence of the direct testimony from the Christian books which in such a question is all-important. It is not too much to say that evidence of this kind is almost entirely wanting.

Is this significant? Are our Congregational friends beginning to find out that there is no doctrine of Atonement?—to hold with Dr. Horton that the 'orthodoxy of the New Testament' does not include such a feature?—that it gives us only the bare fact of atonement, whatever this may

be, while we, inquirers into things divine, are left to grope our way in the dark, without Scriptural light or guidance?

Some account of the doctrine, however, *may* be found in Dr. Fairbairn's pages. The Atonement, he tells us, 'works in the universe as the manifest and embodied judgment of God against sin.' . . . 'It is designed to create in man all the effects of corrective and remedial sufferings; to do the work of restorative and reformatory penalties: . . . It burns into the soul of the sinner the sense of the evil and the shame of sin, forces him to look at it with God's eyes, to judge it with his conscience, to hate it with his hate.' Many readers will object to the strangely anthropomorphic character of these expressions; others will ask the question, WHAT *is* it, that has worked in the universe these startling and hitherto unheard-of effects? It is indicated only by the word 'Atonement,' which is not, as we have seen, a New Testament word at all, and ought to be replaced by the term Reconciliation. Further, as to the description of what the

Atonement *does* and how it *works* in the universe, we have to ask, How does that description harmonize with the statements of theologians before named? One of these may be dismissed at once, for he declines to consider either what the Atonement is, or how it 'works,' and virtually tells us that we know nothing about it. Another is more explicit. He declares that by the Atonement Christ took upon him the sufferings 'which ought to have been ours'; and thus surely the Death does *not* 'burn into the soul' the sense of the enormity of sin; it rather tends to lessen that sense by showing how easily punishment may be transferred from the actual sinner and put upon a substitute. The learned writer in 'Lux Mundi' again is contented to say that the Atonement enables men to bear the punishment of sin, not with any inburnt sense of shame but 'gladly'; and so do these notable authorities traverse or even contradict one another, thus in effect throwing an obvious discredit upon the doctrine which it is their desire to uphold.

When, again, Dr. Fairbairn affirms of the Atonement that it burns into the soul of the sinner the sense of the evil and the shame of sin, the questions are inevitable, To how many of the miserably sinful men met with in daily life does this highly wrought description apply? Where are they to be seen? How does the author *know* of their existence, or of the sense of evil and the burning shame within them which their misdeeds deserve, and which, alas, callous and hardened men apparently so little feel? Such assertions as these are surely but dreams of the same conjectural and speculative order which prevails so largely in all these Atonement schemes. They are without foundation equally in the realities of common experience and in the words of the New Testament.

Dr. Fairbairn's account of what the Atonement must be is followed by a passage which strangely speaks of the 'pain' and 'sorrow' of 'the Father' in the presence of the evil of the universe. It would be satisfactory to know the source

of this intimate knowledge of the Divine mind—seeing that we may look for it in vain in the words either of Christ or of any Christian apostle. Perhaps the explanation is implied in such phrases as the following: 'What was innermost in God' is said to be revealed to us by the Incarnation: by this the 'complete revelation of God as he is in himself and to himself' is 'disclosed to man'; again, 'the sense of man's evil and misery became the [Divine] impulse to speak and to help,' and thus led to the 'surrender of the Son.' These extraordinary statements suggest the question, Was not the supreme holiness and intolerance of sin plainly revealed to the Hebrews of old, centuries before Christ was born? In Isaiah, for example, chapters i., ii., v.; can anything stronger than this prophetic denunciation of wickedness be found in connexion with Christ? So it is in Micah and in other prophets. What then can be meant by the doctrine (pp. 485–6) that the Divine attitude towards sin was first or specially revealed to man by the Atone-

ment and the 'suffering it cost the eternal Father'?

There remains for notice a point of the highest importance in connexion with these discussions. It concerns what may be termed the ditheistic character so frequently apparent in the argument, on the orthodox side of the question. From the nature of the case this non-Christian element is evidently inseparable from it; and the same element is exemplified in Dr. Fairbairn's volume much as in other works that might be mentioned. He writes: 'Theology has no falser idea than that of the impassibility of God'; and affirms thus: 'The Father did suffer, though it was not as the Son that he suffered, but in modes distinct and different.' 'Distinct and different.' Then were there not *Two* that suffered—one distinctly and differently from the other? How could there be distinct and different 'modes' of suffering, if there were only *one* sufferer? So again: 'He who gave to duty had not the reward of him who rejoiced to do it'; and once again: 'The

humiliation of the Son involved the visible passion and death, but the surrender of the Father involved the sorrow that was the invisible sacrifice' (Fairbairn, p. 484). Two persons and two divine sufferers, again; one acting to surrender and one in humiliation and death; *two*, not *one*; or are we, in these theological speculations, expected to take leave of ordinary logic and common sense?

It has been noticed above that in this section of Dr. Fairbairn's work there is no adequate use of evidence from Scripture, no appeal such as was to be expected to either Law or Testimony for the various propositions which he lays before us. There is a slight exception to this: following the words last quoted we read (p. 484): 'And this is the Biblical doctrine, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"; "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all"; "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins"'; 'But what,' the author exclaims, 'do these verses mean, if

not that the essence and act of sacrifice was the surrender of the Son by the Father?' A little investigation of the meaning by looking beneath the surface of the sacred page, yields a reasonable answer to this question. Jesus according to the Fourth Gospel, was the Divine Logos incarnate; that is, he was the manifestation of the will and wisdom of the distant and invisible Supreme in the form of a human being. As such, he was pre-eminently entitled to the appellation Son; the Logos is so termed by Philo long before the Fourth Gospel was in existence. Jesus, again, as the Hebrew Messiah was also, according to Hebrew ideas, the beloved Son. In another and equivalent form of expression, he was the 'only begotten Son.'[1] Thus from two sides, so to speak,

[1] He might also be termed an 'only begotten God,' seeing that the Logos was God himself in his outward manifestation in Christ: 'only begotten,' in the sense (sometimes) of 'dearly beloved,' as an only son; but in reference to the Logos in a more metaphysical sense. See John i. 1, i. 18, in Revised Version.

the Christ was emphatically the Son. Yet, contrary to all expectation on the part of the disciples, the heavenly Father for his own purposes allowed the bearer of this august character to suffer and die, as abundantly shown and illustrated in the preceding section of this Essay.

In this there was nothing occult or incomprehensible, as it is set forth in the New Testament. There is nothing to indicate to us sacrifice or suffering on the part of the Divine Father, any more than when he allows any good man to be the victim of persecution and death, as often has occurred in the history of the world. But yet one great mystery is said to have been involved in the death of the Messiah, only it was not of the kind which orthodox theology desiderates! It was hidden, St. Paul tells us, from the foundation of the world, and it was this, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs with ancient Israel, Eph. iii., as before cited. And to open the way for their admission the Divine purposes required the surrender, the death, even of the beloved Son and that surrender

was made; but all Dr. Fairbairn's ingenious speculation respecting the sorrow and suffering of God in allowing such a result is in truth only an outburst of the merest imaginative theorizing, seeing that there is little or nothing to this effect in the New Testament.

As to the words 'propitiation for our sins,' the sense in which those words might be used has been sufficiently pointed out in the preceding sections. Jesus by the influence of his life and death was the true propitiation and propitiatory sacrifice, inasmuch as he thus achieved the great work, not of appeasing the heavenly Father, the source and manifester of love itself, but simply of reconciling and bringing men to God—the same purpose which was supposed to be effected by the observances and sacrifices of the ancient ceremonial law.

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